

Stuart Osborne Bondurant Jr. '50

You can say that Stuart Bondurant's medical career started going around in circles very soon after he graduated. But you can't say he didn't move quickly. He was involved in the early research on heart attack. Being in the Air Force during the space race, he became interested in human tolerance of the effects of rocket acceleration. He took charge of the human centrifuge at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, with which he could create a situation that put great stress on the heart.

Medical ethics at the time dictated that you do nothing to a human test subject that you wouldn't first do to yourself. That's how Stuart came to be the first to ride every centrifuge in the Western world at that time. His research set the outer limits for tolerance, and contributed to the design of seats in space capsules.

Whatever dizziness he experienced could not have been long-term, when you consider what else he did before he returned to Carolina. As chief of the medical branch of the Artificial Heart-Myocardial Infarction Program of the National Heart Institute in the mid-1960s, he established the first organized research on heart attack.

Add five years as president and dean of Albany Medical College, and it might seem as if he had already had a full career by the time he arrived in Chapel Hill in 1979. A quick comparison of the UNC School of Medicine then and now shows that Stuart was just getting started.

He has been called the "dean of deans," both for his three terms at the helm, and for the extraordinary progress of the medical school under his leadership.

Stuart left Winston-Salem for the University at age 16. Since the medical school was a two-year school at the time and a transfer was necessary anyway, he did his complete medical training at Duke. In fact, he left for Duke after three years at UNC but not before his Phi Beta Kappa induction here.

UNC became a full four-year school in a time when 20-30 new medical schools were starting up across the country. Most of these post-war schools were research-intensive, and UNC was no exception. In 1979 Stuart accepted the challenge of building on the school's strengths in clinical medicine and teaching.

The growth in facilities, programs and innovation in only 15 years exceeds anything this campus has ever experienced.

He brought in a new generation of researchers and scholars who are tops in their fields; he instituted curriculum reform that became a national model; he oversaw tremendous expansion of the organ transplant program, which now is an everyday procedure; he put in place one of the country's pioneering programs of emergency medicine.

The departments of Biomedical Engineering, Emergency Medicine, Nutrition, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and Radiation Oncology came to life under Stuart's tenure. We built an outstanding Ambulatory Care Center – one of almost 20 new centers and specialized programs started during this time. Existing programs such as the Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies expanded and gained prestige.

Stuart has always believed you cannot have a really great medical school without a really great university. He was an enthusiastic advocate for the College of Arts and Sciences' Foundation for Excellence campaign. Unlike many other medical schools which are separate from their parent institutions in geography and in mind, he has worked to keep UNC's an integral part of the University. This will become more important as health care reform brings major changes in the relationships between medical schools and the rest of the care system.

He has kept a keen eye on the responsibility this school has to the citizens of this state. As the only medical school with a statewide mission, UNC is the largest single source of physicians. It now does almost half its clinical training in community-based settings rather than in hospitals. The Area Health Education Center program, started here and spread across North Carolina, is a national model.

Stuart also lent his expertise outside the school. He worked for seven years with development of the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, and chaired its board. He also chaired the Governor's Commission on Reduction of Infant Mortality and the Triangle Universities Licensing Consortium, and he was a leader of the Healthy Start Foundation. His stature is recognized nationally and internationally — he has been president of the American College of Physicians, and chair of the Association of American Medical Colleges, and is a fellow in the Royal College of Physicians of London and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

He handed out 2,830 MD diplomas. He left the deanship in 1994, but for the last year he has been back as interim dean, devoted to making the job attractive to the best candidates available.

Stuart Bondurant's measure for success of the UNC School of Medicine does not track national rankings – it adheres to a simple commitment that it effectively serve the people of North Carolina. As he reminds us, this is a mission impossible to fulfill without being excellent by any standards. The school is in robust good health as he trades the deanship for an office in a quieter corner of MacNider Hall, and his true legacy stretches in all directions across his native state.