

The Columbus Dispatch

Dr. Edward Cutler | 1949-2015: Pediatrician made sacrifices to treat poor in Franklinton

Written by: Mark Ferenchik, November 30, 2015

He was always passionate and sometimes cantankerous.

But Dr. Edward Cutler cared. He cared about the poor, struggling patients he treated in the Franklinton neighborhood where he lived.

Even after he was hospitalized this year, the pediatrician planned to continue serving those patients, a number of whom have behavioral problems.

Cutler died recently of recurrent aspiration pneumonia while in hospice care in Hamilton in southwestern Ohio. He was 66.

His death leaves a gap in a part of the city that needs his type of practice.

“They don’t get the fine-tuned care that Dr. Cutler gave them,” said Dr. Ralph Ankenman of Cedarville, Ohio, a friend and colleague.

Cutler wasn’t from Franklinton, but he became part of that neighborhood’s fabric. He was born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y. His father also was a doctor — an ear, nose and throat specialist.

Cutler studied at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Missouri and began practicing in the Franklinton area in 1982. He ran for the Columbus school board in the 1980s, in part to try to save the old Central High School in Franklinton, which now is part of COSI Columbus.

“He chose to live and work in that area rather than affluent areas, where it would be ... easier for him,” said his brother, Robert Cutler of Charlotte, N.C. “He dedicated his life and his income supporting the area.

“He had a different mission.”

Robert Cutler said his brother told him that he lost money on most of his patients. “He did not get reimbursed for expenses.”

Edward Cutler said in 2010 that he had about 600 patients, many of them on Medicaid. Cutler didn’t pay himself a salary to work in an area the federal government designated a health-professional-shortage area.

PrimaryOne Health, formerly Columbus Neighborhood Health Center, has a clinic on W. Broad Street on the Hilltop.



Dr. Edward Cutler, a pediatrician, met with Debra Shirey of Circleville and son Ben Shirey of Centerville in his crowded office in 2010.

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Lower Lights Christian Health Center in Franklinton works with low-income patients, too, said Cathy Levine, executive director of the consumer-advocacy organization Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio.

But Franklinton needs more primary-care physicians and pediatricians because many low-income residents lack transportation, Levine said.

Beyond the community's needs, Ankenman said that Cutler was a father figure to many patients, some of whom seldom made it to their appointments on time and couldn't stick to rules.

Dr. John O'Handley, a family-practice physician with Mount Carmel Community Outreach, said he met Cutler a couple of years ago.

"He was very dedicated to the poor and underserved," O'Handley said.

Cutler also was opinionated and did not hold back on criticisms of third-party Medicaid providers.

"He could be very difficult," Robert Cutler said. "Most of the time he was right."

But it was his dedication to his patients that attracted a national following on SERMO, an online social-media site for physicians.

"I was impressed with his wisdom and compassion for his patients," said Dr. Linda Girgis, who practices in South River, N.J.

Girgis said she never met Cutler, but said she was touched by his experiences, how he always seemed positive despite his financial struggles.

In 2010, The Dispatch profiled Cutler and the difficulties he faced keeping his practice going. His office had lost natural-gas service because of late payments and was about to lose electricity. At the time, the physician seemed much more interested in treating his patients than running a business.

The doctors in SERMO had come to his aid a year earlier. He estimated they sent \$3,000 to help pay the bills.

Still, the problems persisted. Cutler lost his Franklinton house to foreclosure and moved into the Sullivant Avenue house where he saw patients.

He stuck it out until he became ill this year and was admitted to the hospital with a bowel obstruction, said social worker Pat Baynes, who knew Cutler through Ankenman. Cutler also had diabetes, she said.

"He was very angry and frustrated with the loss of his health," Baynes said. "I think he was a very brilliant and very determined kind of man."

Cutler died on Oct. 20 and was buried in New York City, his brother said.