

DermatologyTimes

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Physician's Profile: Quest for excellence: Busy doctor follows in footsteps of parents, grandfather

By Lisette Hilton

Charles E. Crutchfield III, M.D., seemed destined for a career in medicine. His mother, Susan, a family practitioner, was the first black female — and youngest, at age 23 — to graduate from the University of Minnesota Medical School, in 1963. His father, Charles II, is a nationally recognized obstetrician-gynecologist.

Even Dr. Crutchfield's grandfather, Charles I, was a doctor of sorts.

"My grandfather, who at 95 years old is still alive, was a barber. In the old days, barbers were considered physician-like. That is where the barber pole comes from, because they used to do surgery and would hang out the red bloody rags, which meant the surgeon is operating," Dr. Crutchfield says.

"He was in business long after those days, but in a small segregated southern town in the 1930s and '40s, with very limited healthcare, he did more than his share of 'first aid,'" he says.

Not only did the dermatologist follow in his family's successful footsteps, but he has made a name for himself. In the past few years, he and his practice have been honored, recognized and referred to for dermatologic expertise, teaching, patriotism and practice management.

Practice management

Dr. Crutchfield is the sole dermatologist and physician in a practice with about 40 full- and part-time employees. His was the first dermatology practice to implement electronic medical records (EMRs) in Minnesota, and he was one of the first in the United States to offer WiFi in the reception area.

"We specialize in ethnic skin concerns, atopic eczema, acne, vitiligo, psoriasis and cosmetic dermatology. We have a phototherapy center, two medical spas, and are considered one of the leading cosmetic dermatology practices in Minnesota," he says.

"Seventy-five percent of my practice is medical dermatology, and 25 percent is cosmetic dermatology. Between these entities we often schedule more than 150 patients in a day," Dr. Crutchfield tells Dermatology Times.

That breaks down to as many as 48 patient encounters for each four-hour clinic for Dr. Crutchfield. The rest of the patients go to the practice's phototherapy center, nursing clinic and medical spas.

Dr. Crutchfield also does laser surgery, having performed more than 10,000 laser procedures throughout the last 10 years.

All this is possible, he says, because of the way he runs his practice.



"It is the way I think all dermatology practices should be run. It maximizes the dermatologist's expertise and skills. If I had to do it the way I used to do it, I think I would probably leave medicine," he says.

Support staff

When Dr. Crutchfield opened his practice seven years ago, well-known coding expert and Dermatology Times columnist Inga Ellzey introduced him to the concept of having one nurse per patient room, versus the traditional way of practicing with one nurse for every one or even two physicians.

His nurses, according to Dr. Crutchfield, participate fully in patient care — short of the clinical exam, diagnosis and treatment plan.

"The very skilled and highly trained nursing staff acts very much like residents presenting a case. It relieves me from doing a lot of the undesirable paperwork, because I have support staff that work as EMR charting scribes and help me to prepare the prescriptions that I direct and administer detailed patient education.

"It allows me to have a more quality encounter with patients and do what I am trained to do — diagnose and develop treatment plans for my patients. I still see every medical patient that comes into my practice," Dr. Crutchfield says.

Crutchfield Dermatology started in 2002, with the help of Healthcare Management Resources, a company whose expertise is in medical practice start-ups. In seven years, the practice has seen more than 30,000 unique patients, with about 25,000 total patient visits a year, according to Dr. Crutchfield.

"The system is beautiful. I love it. I get up every day and cannot wait to get to work," he says.

In order to keep things running smoothly, Dr. Crutchfield takes care of his hard-working nurses. He pays, every year, to send them to the national Dermatology Nurses Association convention, and he has been recognized by the association for the effort.

"Our entire staff is exceptional; without them, the system would not work," he says.

The system seems to be working. Physicians do not hesitate to refer to the practice.

"In the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, there were 529 physicians and healthcare providers that referred patients to see us in the last 12-month period," Dr. Crutchfield says.

For years, consumers and colleagues have voted Crutchfield Dermatology a top practice in Minneapolis/St. Paul. His Web site features pages of awards and honors in local and national publications and other media.

Clinical expertise

The only black dermatologist in Minnesota, Dr. Crutchfield has developed expertise and a reputation among patients and colleagues in ethnic skincare and disorders.

In a recent national survey of medical institutions and physicians (*Black Enterprise* magazine), Dr. Crutchfield was recognized as one of the 10 leading black dermatologists in the United States.

"When you are dealing with different skin disorders, depending on the hue of the skin, they have different presentations. Things that normally in white skin look pink or red tend to look more copper, or gray or violet-appearing in brown skin," Dr. Crutchfield says.

"And a condition that started two days ago looks a lot different than a skin disease that is months old," he adds.

To more clearly describe how different skin conditions vary among ethnicities, Dr. Crutchfield wrote — along

with the late Bernard Ackerman, M.D., and other dermatologists — "A Clinical Atlas of 101 Common Skin Diseases."

Time to teach

Dr. Crutchfield devotes Wednesday and Friday afternoons to teaching and practice administration. He also hosts a steady stream of medical students and residents in his practice.

Medical students honored him with the teacher of the year award at the University of Minnesota in 2006. He also teaches dermatology residents and has an appointment as visiting professor of biology at the nationally recognized Carleton College.

"The approach I take is that I talk about real-life situations, real-life problems and real-life solutions. I also always emphasize what are the real important things to know, because every day, medical students are inundated with information," Dr. Crutchfield says.

Getting 'better and better'

When asked what is next, Dr. Crutchfield says he thinks his career has hit its stride.

"But my belief is constant and never-ending improvement," he says. "We are always trying to get better and better. We give out awards to employees that come up with good ideas. The daily questions always are: What can we do to make our practice run better, and what can we do to serve our patients better?" he says.

Charles E. Crutchfield III, M.D.

Born:

1961
Minneapolis, Minn.

Medical school:

Mayo Clinic
Graduate School of Medicine
Rochester, Minn.

Transitional Internship:

Gundersen Clinic
La Crosse, Wis.

Dermatology residency:

University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minn.

Family:

Wife, Laurie; three children,
Olivia, 8; Charles IV, 5; Arianna, 2

Hobbies:

Playing with his children, table tennis, collecting
sports memorabilia, painting,
and being official team dermatologist
for the Minnesota Twins baseball team

Charles E. Crutchfield III, M.D.



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