PURE DEVOTION
DR. FRANKEL PROVIDES CARE TO DETROIT RESIDENTS

It’s not uncommon for Dr. Kevin Frankel to take care of the whole patient, and even the patient’s family, while working at Northside Medical Center with his father, Jerome. But what sets Frankel apart from other doctors providing family care lies in Northside’s address—it’s in Detroit.

“There aren’t a lot of places for those patients to go within the city that’s not a clinic setting where you’re seeing a different doctor (compared to) where you have true family physician who sees patients,” Frankel says. “Many of these patients have little to no transportation, and it’s difficult for them to go see the doctor.”

Frankel, who completed his medical education at Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine, finds joy in the opportunity to help patients who have previously had little access to family physicians with an open practice close to their home. “I think the problems are a lot different (in Detroit),” Frankel explains. “They are multilayered. They involve taking care of the whole patient and all the issues that surround illness.”

Northside has been in the community for over 30 years at the same northwest Detroit location and even offers Saturday hours for patients who are unable to take off work during the week. “We have a lot of auto workers who are working Monday through Friday, shift working, and Saturday is the only day they can get it,” he notes. While he treats patients for many different conditions, he says the three most common are diabetes, high blood pressure and hepatitis C.

But when Frankel isn’t treating patients at the medical practice, he’s training the next generation of osteopathic physicians at Botsford Hospital where he is the interim director of medical education and physician director of clerkships. In addition to that, he is in the second year of his two-year term as president of Botsford Hospital’s medical staff where he leads the hospital’s medical executive committee and maintains communications between the medical staff and the hospital.

“You want to do whatever you can, and I think being a doctor in the city is what I feel I can do,” Frankel says. “Maybe I can’t help them with this, that and the other thing, but if I’m there as a resource to people who don’t have a lot of resources, I feel like I’m doing my part.”

CRITICAL SERVICE
CARDIAC SURGEON HELPS HEAL CHILDREN’S HEARTS

For Dr. Henry “Hal” Walters III, no two surgeries are alike. As chief of cardiovascular surgery for DMC Children’s Hospital of Michigan, every patient is unique. “It’s not ever unusual for me to see something I’ve never seen before,” Walters says. “It just becomes a way of life.”

The challenge of diagnosing and fixing an infinite array of congenital defects is one reason Walters was drawn to his sub-specialty. Another is his personal experience with loss.

Growing up, Walters’ sister died of leukemia, and he and his wife, Katherine, lost three infants to genetic disease. “I’ve always had a heart for children and trying to help them in some meaningful way,” he says.

Walters operates primarily on infants and children, but his patients also return to him as adults. He’s currently working on laboratory research in hopes to someday reduce the need for follow-up surgeries. Current practice often uses homografts to replace missing or malfunctioning arteries and valves, but these conduits—donated by families who have lost a child—must be replaced over time. Walters and his fellow researchers are striving to grow valved conduits from patients’ own tissue. “They will have the potential to grow and stay normal over the patient’s life,” he says. “We aren’t there yet, but that’s what research is all about—to understand how to do these things and develop the technology over time.”

Walters has published close to 100 peer-reviewed articles in cardiac surgical journals, written dozens of book chapters, and presented hundreds of lectures. He is on the faculty of Wayne State University where he teaches cardiology fellows, pediatrics residents and critical care medicine fellows at Children’s Hospital of Michigan. He also serves on the International Society for the Nomenclature of Pediatric and Congenital Heart Disease, where he is working with a committee of doctors to come up with consistent terminology to be used in hospitals around the world.

Yet for all his achievements, Walters deflects the spotlight onto the rest of his cardiovascular surgery team, his nurses, and his supportive family. He and his wife restored an old farmhouse in Manchester, Mich., where she takes on most of the responsibility for raising sheep and hay. The couple has two grown daughters, but speak openly about their loss in hopes of relating to others who face the difficult choice to have their children undergo heart surgery.

“I wake up every morning feeling grateful for the privilege of being able to serve my patients and their families in such a critical and meaningful way,” Walters says.

— Wensdy Von Buskirk