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Providing a Safety Net for Others:

Kim Morrisette, D.O. '01 / *Emergency physician, Tacoma, WA*

DURING HER THIRD YEAR AT UMASS MEDICAL SCHOOL, Kim Morrisette, D.O. '01 found her calling. Morrisette experienced an epiphany in the midst of the “organized chaos” of a hospital emergency department (ED).

“I did a clinical rotation in the ED,” she explained. “I found myself engrossed in the organized chaos, where one minute you can be taking care of a child with an ear infection, and the next moment you are literally saving the life of a dying patient. I enjoyed the puzzle and the challenge of making a diagnosis for a wide variety of patients.

“Emergency physicians are experts in resuscitation and acute illness. I suddenly knew that a career in emergency medicine would fulfill my desire to serve others. In the ED, we are the safety net for people who have nowhere else to go.”

The dream of becoming a physician had inspired Morrisette at an early age and she came to Assumption knowing that medical school was her goal. The College’s strong academic reputation, its proximity to her family in Assonet, MA, and the opportunity to play volleyball made Assumption the ideal choice. “Assumption is small enough to be personable and interactive with the students, while still large enough to have a stimulating academic environment with many opportunities. Studying at a Catholic liberal arts college helped me grow as a person, not just a student.”

A Presidential Scholarship recipient, Morrisette was impressed by Associate Professor of Biology and Chemistry Kimberly Schandel when they met at an open house for accepted students. “Professor Schandel was down to earth, personable, smart and engaging. She became an excellent role model for me.”

A biology major, Morrisette minored in theology, which broadened her world view, helped her appreciate other cultures and provided a sense of humanity to her work. “In emergency medicine, we face the greatest stresses of life: illness, death of loved ones and dealing with one’s own mortality,” she explained. “In spite of this, we are blessed with the opportunity to witness the strength of the human spirit. My Catholic faith has helped me care for my patients and try to understand my own limitations as a physician, wife, daughter and friend.”

She calls her Assumption experience “instrumental” in preparing her for the intellectual and emotional demands of medical school and a career in medicine. “In addition to many stimulating conversations with professors Owen Sholes and Ed Dix, I recall working on a fascinating forensic pathology project with Professor Hubert Meunier.”

Morrisette attended the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine in Maine, and after graduating, she spent the next three years as a resident at UMass Medical Center in Worcester. She worked almost 80 hours a week during her residency in emergency medicine and served as chief resident during her last year, helping to run the residency program and teach other residents.

After completing her residency in 2008, she moved to Seattle, where she resides with her husband, Patrick Solari, also an emergency physician. Morrisette divides her work week between two busy com-

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munity hospitals in nearby Tacoma.

Being an emergency room physician demands a highly specialized combination of knowledge, people skills, stamina, patience and tolerance. “We see all patients in the ED, regardless of their problems or ability to pay,” Morrisette explained. “Life in the ED can be hectic. It demands the ability to multi-task and to make quick decisions – sometimes with limited information. Emergency physicians function as a team with nurses, techs and support staff. You often see people on their worst day and sometimes have to deliver bad news. Despite this, having the opportunity to save lives, ease pain or give good news far outweighs the difficulties I face in my job.”

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Morrisette’s view of the national healthcare debate centers on her concern for the individuals she treats. “The challenges facing doctors as they care for their patients are myriad. They include limited access to follow-up care, a lack of primary care physicians in the community and the high cost medications and procedures,” she said. “Government-funded programs only go so far and there are many hardworking folks who are uninsured. While I feel proud that the ED serves as the safety net for medical care in the community, it’s frustrating to see that more and more people are falling through the cracks.

“I believe that the most important issues in healthcare currently are access to care and the cost of healthcare coverage,” she said. “I also believe that healthcare is a right, not a privilege. I hope that we get to a point in this country that everyone can receive excellent quality medical care.”

Emergency medicine is her calling and Tacoma-area residents are the beneficiaries of Dr. Kim Morrisette’s compassion and expertise. ❖