

A special force: Former Green Beret honored for shaping profession's young

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STAFF EDITOR

Osteopathic medical students serving clinical rotations under the supervision of James M. Lally, DO, MMM, should remember two important rules: 1. Always be on time, and 2. Always be where you are supposed to be.

With a background as a US Army Special Forces medic trained in guerilla tactics, martial arts and unconventional warfare, Dr Lally's emphasis on punctuality and discipline should come as no surprise.

Although he has a reputation for being tough, Dr Lally's approachable style and supportive nature have resonated with the hundreds of osteopathic medical students, interns and residents he has mentored throughout nearly two decades as a family physician.

In addition to serving as the president and chief medical officer of the Chino (Calif) Valley Medical Center, Dr Lally oversees the hospital's medical education program. He also serves as the medical director of a clinic in nearby Montclair, Calif, where he supervises a training program for first- and second-year students from the West-

ern University of Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific (WesternU/COMP) in Pomona, Calif. Bolstered by the success of that clinic, Dr Lally opened a free clinic four years ago near the Chino Valley Medical Center.

"The lessons Dr Lally taught me are still with me today," says Christopher Salem, DO, who first met his mentor three years ago while completing a rotation in obstetrics and gynecology at the Chino Valley Medical Center. "He is the kind of physician who invests time, money and sweat in the students and young DOs he mentors."

Last fall, the AOA recognized Dr Lally's mentoring efforts by naming him its 2008 Mentor of the Year during the AOA convention in Las Vegas. Like many military veterans honored for their actions, Dr Lally insists his accomplishments are nothing extraordinary. "I feel privileged and humbled to be recognized as an outstanding mentor, but I'm not doing anything that hasn't been done by thousands of other physicians who mentor those following behind them," he says.

Members of the AOA's Mentor of the Year selection committee disagreed, choosing Dr Lally from a pool of more than 140 DOs and other leaders nominated by nearly 200 college students, osteopathic medical students, interns, residents and practicing physicians.

Kristina Marie Manion, OMS IV, who chaired the Mentor of the Year selection committee, says that despite stiff competition from other finalists, Dr Lally was an obvious choice for the 2008 award. "The nominations we received for Dr Lally pointed to all the qualities we look for in an outstanding mentor," says Manion, who will graduate this spring from the Kansas City (Mo) University of Medicine and

James M. Lally, DO, MMM, lectures residents, interns and students from the Western University of Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific in Pomona, Calif.

(Photo courtesy of SolidLine Media)



Biosciences College of Osteopathic Medicine. “It is clear that Dr Lally goes out of his way to lend support and guidance to the students and DOs he trains.”

In the trenches

The son of an Army sergeant major who survived the Bataan Death March and was held as a prisoner of war for three years during World War II, Dr Lally spent much of his childhood traveling the globe with his family, moving 13 times before graduating from high school in 1972 while living in Okinawa, Japan.

“My attitude toward mentoring started to develop when I was a child,” explains Dr Lally. “I come from a military family, so I was raised within a self-imposed rank structure.”

Although he envisioned himself establishing roots and settling down as a young man, the lure of a military career proved too strong. The same year he graduated from high school, Dr Lally enlisted in the Army, quickly advancing through Infantry, Airborne and Ranger training in less than two years. In 1974, he refocused his career by enlisting in the Army Special Forces and training as a medic.

During his four years as a Green Beret, Dr Lally honed many of the skills most commonly observed in big-budget action movies: parachuting from helicopters, swimming treacherous waters, scaling mountainous ranges and evading enemy gunfire.

Leaving the service in 1978, Dr Lally worked in pharmaceutical sales for

only a few months before enlisting again. That same year, he became the first Army reservist selected for training as a physician assistant. Assigned to care for US and Caribbean peace-keeping forces, he provided medical services for more than 700 military personnel during the invasion of Grenada in 1983.

Throughout his time in the military, Dr Lally earned more than 20 commendations, badges and awards, including the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal and the Army Commendation Medal for heroism. However, his 15-year military career was cut short in 1987 when he broke his back during a parachute jump.

“That was really a turning point in

my life,” Dr Lally says. Having earned college credits through Army and night school courses, he graduated from Excelsior College in Albany, NY, and landed an interview at WesternU/COMP. “I was accepted, and I’ve never looked back,” he says.

Business matters

After graduating and completing his internship and residency, Dr Lally joined with Thomas Woodbury, DO, to establish a family practice in Chino in 1994. A few years later, he began pursuing a master’s degree in medical management through Carnegie Mellon University’s H. John Heinz III College in Pittsburgh.

The final assignment for one of Dr Lally’s graduate courses required



James M. Lally, DO, MMM, emphasizes a point during a briefing at the Chino (Calif) Valley Medical Center.

“You are only as good as the physician behind you,” says Dr Lally, the 2008 AOA Mentor of the Year. “Helping younger DOs and students benefits the entire profession.”

(Photo courtesy of SolidLine Media)

Five recognized as Mentor of the Year finalists

The AOA Mentor of the Year award honors members of the profession who are helping to shape the future of the osteopathic medical profession by mentoring new physicians and students.

Established in association with Pfizer Inc, the AOA iLearn Mentor Recognition Program was created by 2003-04 AOA President Darryl A. Beehler, DO. Past recipients of the award are John T. Pham, DO, of Portland, Ore, in 2007; Ruth E. Purdy, DO, of Columbus, Ohio, in 2006; and Cheryl B. Doane, DO, of East Lansing, Mich, in 2005.

In addition to 2008 AOA Mentor of the Year James M. Lally, DO, four other members of the profession were recognized as finalists for the award during the AOA's convention last fall in Las Vegas:

- **David L. Dora, DO**, is the director of medical education for Mercy Health Partners in Muskegon, Mich. In addition, he directs the division of family medicine at the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine (MSUCOM) in East Lansing. A 1977 graduate of the Kansas City (Mo) University of Medicine and Biosciences College of Osteopathic Medicine, Dr Dora has mentored osteopathic medical students, interns and residents throughout his career.

- **Michael J. Fugle, DO**, is a clinical professor of orthopedic surgery at MSUCOM and serves as chief of orthopedic surgery at POH Regional Medical Center in Pontiac, Mich. AOA board certified in orthopedic surgery, Dr Fugle graduated in 1965 from the Kirksville (Mo) College of Osteopathic Medicine-A.T. Still University and served in the US Air Force.

- **Joanne Kaiser-Smith, DO**, is the director of the internal medicine residency program and the division chief of general internal medicine at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-School of Osteopathic Medicine (UMDNJ-SOM) in Stratford. In addition to advising the school's Student Osteopathic Internal Medicine Association, Dr Kaiser-Smith serves on UMDNJ-SOM's Graduate Medical Education Committee.

- **M. Reza Nassiri, DSc**, is the assistant dean and director of the Institute of International Health at MSUCOM. He previously served as the dean of health sciences at the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) in Erie, Pa, where he founded the college's Medical Science Research Club. A past recipient of LECOM's John and Sylvia Ferretti Distinguished Teacher Award, Dr Nassiri served as faculty advisor for LECOM's International Medical Society.

—Brooke Johnson



AOA Mentor of the Year finalists pose for a photo with AOA President Carlo J. DiMarco, DO, and Cathryn M. Clary, MD, during the distinguished mentor reception the AOA held in Las Vegas in October 2008. Pictured are James M. Lally, DO, MMM (left), Dr DiMarco, Joanne Kaiser-Smith, DO, Dr Clary, M. Reza Nassiri, DSc, David L. Dora, DO, and Michael J. Fugle, DO.

Dr Clary is the vice president of US external medical affairs for Pfizer Inc, which sponsors the AOA iLearn Mentor Recognition Program. (Photo by Michael Fitzgerald)

ruptcy, Dr Lally struck a deal with a real estate investment trust that was interested in the property, lined up investors, and leased the medical care services back to a healthcare management group he organized.

A short time later, he used a similar strategy to buy the Chino Valley Medical Center, offering all 262 physicians on staff an opportunity to invest in the deal. In 2004, Prime Healthcare Systems Inc purchased the hospital, where Dr Lally has stayed on as president and CMO.

Though he doesn't encourage any of his trainees to rush out and buy a hospital, Dr Lally aims to provide them with skills they will need to manage the business side of medicine. "Wherever they choose to practice, DOs need to have a firm grasp of basic business principles to succeed," he says.

When Jason R. Abney, DO, finishes his residency at Chino Valley Medical Center this spring, he says he will enter into practice with his eyes open

him to complete an independent project. So he confidently announced to his professors that he planned to acquire a hospital. And that's exactly

what he did. Twice.

After setting his sights on a 59-bed acute care psychiatric inpatient hospital in Chino that was headed for bank-

to the challenges of running a business, thanks to lessons he has learned from Dr Lally. “Medical school doesn’t necessarily prepare you to run a practice,” he says. “One of the advantages of having Dr Lally for an attending is that he gives us pearls of knowledge about the business of medicine almost every day.”

During daily morning reports with interns and residents, Dr Lally discusses the best course of action to take with patients, both medically and financially. “Dr Lally works with us to determine how to treat patients in an effective and timely manner, so there is no delay of care and we don’t waste money on treatments and hospital stays that are unnecessary,” Dr Abney says.

Pearline P. Chong, DO, says practicing alongside Dr Lally for the last two years has helped her develop the skills she will need to become a successful physician after she finishes her residency. “Each day, I learn something new from him,” she says. “Dr Lally truly gives students and DOs a taste of what it’s like in the real world.”

Giving back

Through his mentoring, Dr Lally encourages students and young DOs to extend themselves beyond their normal duties and give back to the community. Leading by example, he often gives up his own evenings and weekends to provide medical services for residents in Chino and the surrounding region. “His enthusiasm makes the rest of us want to get involved too,” Dr Salem says.

Located roughly 35 miles east of Los Angeles, Chino is nestled in the shadow of the San Gabriel Valley Mountains. Making his home there

for two decades, Dr Lally has provided medical services for thousands of local children and adults with limited access to healthcare.

During the last 15 years, Dr Lally has completed nearly 10,000 free physical exams for high school athletes in the Chino area, often enlisting interns and residents from the hospital to help. In addition, he recruits students and DOs to volunteer at the City of Montclair Free Clinic.

“It is important to him that we get involved early on in our careers,” says Lesley Jo Baladjay-Lindley, DO, a third-year resident at the Chino Valley Medical Center who cared for patients at the free clinic last year. “His influence has really motivated me to reach out to underserved patients in our community.”

For Dr Lally, these activities are simply a small way to give back to a profession he loves. “Because I was an older student, I most likely would not have been accepted into medical school were it not for the osteopathic medical profession,” he says. “I owe this profession a great deal.”

In addition to providing medical care for patients and underserved populations in Chino, Dr Lally finds time to pursue another great passion

in his life: treating Olympic athletes. In the early 1990s, he began providing medical care to members of the US shooting team who practiced at a complex near his office.

After being elected to the USA Shooting Board of Directors in 1998, Dr Lally was appointed the board’s president in 2004. That same year, he was named the chairman of the medical committee for the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), the primary governing body for more than 156 member federations that represent 65 million shooters around the globe.

Last summer, Dr Lally represented the ISSF at the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, overseeing care for all athletes participating in shooting events. (For more on Dr Lally and other DOs who care for Olympic athletes, see “Medalworkers: DOs Assist Olympic Athletes on Quest for Gold” in the November 2008 issue, which is available on DO-Online, located at www.do-online.org.)

“There seems to be no limit to the time and energy Dr Lally devotes to the activities he is passionate about,” says Dr Salem. “I feel so lucky to be able to learn from him and hope to someday be able to achieve a small fraction of what he has accomplished.”

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Before morning rounds at the Chino (Calif) Valley Medical Center, James M. Lally, DO, MMM (left), meets with Liza Gonzalez, DO, as Ian S. Kirkpatrick, DO (second from right), confers with Pooya Mobasseri, DO. (Photo courtesy of SolidLine Media)

Follow the leader

Dr Lally's interactions with students and young DOs give him the opportunity to build future leaders for the osteopathic medical profession. "For me, being a mentor isn't just about giving back. It's also part of doing business," he explains. "If we can expose these young people to our wonderful profession and get them involved in their state and specialty groups early on, we stand a better chance of keeping them engaged in the profession throughout their careers."

To do just that, Dr Lally has provided several WesternU/COMP students and each of the interns and residents at Chino Valley Medical Center the opportunity to attend the AOA convention for the last several years. In addition, he helps pay for students to attend the AOA House of Delegates' meeting in Chicago each July.

Bavand Youssefzadeh, OMS II, was seated next to Dr Lally during the 2008 House meeting and says he could not have asked for a better leader to guide him through his first experience watching AOA governance in action. "Dr Lally took the time to make sure I understood everything that was going on," recalls Youssefzadeh, a student at WesternU/COMP. "He could have just gone about his business, but he wanted to make sure I took away as much from the experience as possible."

Because he still remembers what it was like to attend osteopathic medical school, Dr Lally has made an extra effort to reach out to students at WesternU/COMP, where he serves as a clinical professor of family medicine. "He has adopted our entire class," says Youssefzadeh.

Providing white coats for first-year medical students and furnishing second-year students with medical bags, Dr Lally is well-known among WesternU/COMP students for his generosity and support. "We know that if there is ever anything we need, Dr Lally will do whatever he can to help," says Youssefzadeh.

Nominate your mentor

The AOA is now accepting nominations for the 2009 Mentor of the Year award. Undergraduate students, osteopathic medical students, interns, residents, practicing DOs, osteopathic specialty societies and state osteopathic medical associations can submit nominations.

The deadline to nominate a mentor is July 19, at the end of the annual meeting of the AOA House of Delegates. Nominations submitted after this date will be considered for the 2010 award.

Visit iLearn

To learn more, visit the iLearn Web site, located at www.ilearn.osteopathic.org. The newly redesigned site provides information for students and young DOs interested in finding mentors, as well as for osteopathic physicians and other members of the profession willing to serve as mentors.

In addition, visitors can read testimonials from program participants, watch videos of 2008 Mentor of the Year finalists, and browse the AOA's Mentor Hall of Fame.

"This program offers osteopathic physicians the perfect opportunity to give something back," 2008 AOA Mentor of the Year James M. Lally, DO, MMM, says. "By taking the time to reach out to students and new DOs, we can make a difference in the future of our profession."

—Brooke Johnson

Firm but gentle

Despite Dr Lally's military background and strict expectations regarding punctuality and professionalism, the students and DOs he mentors list compassion and empathy as his defining attributes.

"Dr Lally might have a tough exterior, but no one is more understanding or supportive of students and DOs than he is," says Dr Baladjay-Lindley.

During her first week of a medical rotation at the Chino Valley Medical Center in 2004, Dr Baladjay-Lindley

had a particularly bad day. "I had just had a baby, so I was dealing with some separation anxiety being away from my daughter," she says. Already feeling emotionally drained, the new mom received a verbal lashing from a dissatisfied patient that left her on the brink of tears.

Ducking into one of the hospital's on-call rooms for a moment alone, Dr Baladjay-Lindley nearly collided with Dr Lally, himself a father of two. "I didn't want him to see me become emotional, but he completely put me at ease," she recalls. After asking a nurse to bring her a small bottle of baby powder, Dr Lally told Dr Baladjay-Lindley to carry the bottle with her so she could remember the way her baby smelled. "It might seem like something small, but it really meant a lot to me," she says.

One of Dr Lally's greatest strengths as a mentor is the fact that he is able to identify with students and young DOs, according to Dr Abney. "He is not only supportive of us, but of our spouses and families as well," he says. "He knows that it's important to nurture those relationships at the same time you are pursuing your education and career."

Regardless of the topic, students and DOs say they can always count on Dr Lally to provide an honest opinion. "Many people are overly concerned with being politically correct and telling you what you want to hear, but Dr Lally is not like that," Dr Chong says. "If you ask him a question, he'll tell you what he truly believes."

As he sat among the trustees and delegates at the AOA House of Delegates' meeting last July, Youssefzadeh felt honored to witness several DOs being recognized by the AOA as Great Pioneers in Osteopathic Medicine. "It occurred to me that I could be sitting next to a future Great Pioneer," he says. "I truly believe Dr Lally has the potential to be one of the leaders who takes our profession to the next level."

AOA