

2016 Kuchling Award

I want to thank the Black Tie dinner board for this honor and recognition of my life's work. There are so many wonderful opportunities to volunteer in our Dallas community and I love and support so many of them: Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal, DIFFA, the Gay and Lesbian Fund of Dallas, the Legal hospice of Texas, Aids Services of Dallas, the Dallas Way, and especially Resource Center which has grown to 3 facilities and opened their new Architecturally and Socially significant building this year. I am proud to have been the medical director for many years and seen the evolution of what was once the Aids Resource Center and Foundation of Human Understanding to now simply the Resource Center with a broader scope to serve all of our community.

But tonight I want to take you back to a sentinel year in the history of Gay Dallas, 1981 –35 years ago, the year of the first Black Tie Dinner. That same year a government publication, MMWR published an article about this strange epidemic of PCP pneumonia and a rare cancer, Kaposi's Sarcoma occurring in New York City and Los Angeles in gay men. We all wondered, "Who's next?" The same year I moved to Galveston, Tx to start medical school at UTMB –yes I studied on Stewart Beach for 4 years—and at John Sealy Hospital where a nurse told me I should go into the room at the end of the hall and talk to that patient and get his history. I found a young man, wasting away, skinny as a rail, alone and frightened. He had no friends or family visiting him. The doctors couldn't find out what infection was slowly make him waste away. He was my first gay patient and even though I couldn't heal him, I learned to not be frightened, to listen and to give hope. I could show up and demonstrate that someone cared. It was 4 more years, 1985 until the disease changed from GRID, Gay related immune deficiency to AIDS caused by the HIV virus and we finally had a test for it.

I went through all the rotations, Gastroenterology, Cardiology, nephrology, Surgery, neurology. None of them called out to me and then I remembered that first patient and realized that I wanted to work in primary care medicine and help patients who were really sick. I more than had my share of very sick patients through residency in Houston at Baylor College of medicine and when I finished in 1988 didn't have much competition to start working in Dallas at UT Southwester in the AIDS clinic. You see Parkland thought the one new drug, AZT was too expensive and they withheld it for years. The activists and patients, including those in ACTUP –sued Parkland and the Doctors. I was hired to help satisfy the outcome of that lawsuit and as co-director of the clinic with Stephen Nightingale leading, we started 3000 pts all at once on the only treatment, AZT. We found out what it could do, the side effects and its limitations in a hurry.

I really must thank Dr Brady Allen who wooed me away from Parkland in 1989 into private practice and soon I had a dozen patients in the hospital, 40 on IV treatments with nutrition, antibiotics, antivirals. So next I must mention Ron Woodroof with his shiny bright eyes, zest for living who really did all of those crazy things for patients in the movie, the Dallas Buyer's club. He was a cowboy with no fear. He would buy, import, ship, smuggle, steal all of those unproven treatments into the US--I was right there starting their IV's and infusing the drugs. I don't know if the drugs helped, but at least we gave the patients hope.

I am so proud to be included in this illustrious list of Kuchling award recipients and one, I want to remember, was John Thomas. A Tall beautiful man, a great leader who was the first president of the AIDS Resource Center and a loss to the epidemic in 1999.

I became an investigator for a phase 2 medication, Viramune which we used at the Resource Center and it along with other new combinations of meds called the cocktail became widely available by 1995 when we saw the death rate from AIDs cut in ½. My practice shifted totally to outpatient care. Soon the combos improved and patients were living better with less side effects. Now my patients mostly don't have problems from their HIV, they are living with complications of aging instead. Since many younger people are taking PREP as part of their program to avoid getting infected with HIV, they no longer live in fear of who's next. Sadly many have no fear and our rates of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis are skyrocketing and many cases of gonorrhea are resistant to the standard antibiotics.

In these last 35 years, we have made great strides in treating HIV-- once a terminal disease to now a chronic one. It has been an awesome time to work in this career, HIV medicine, and this community where I feel such support. I must also thank my partner in life and fiancé, Jim O'Reilly for believing in me and adding the love and glamor from his native NYC.

Namaste.