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2019 Kansas Family Physician of the Year is John Eplee, MD, FAAFP: Advocate for Patients, Kansans and Healthcare

WICHITA, KANSAS –The Kansas Academy of Family Physicians (KAFP) has selected **JOHN EPLEE, MD, FAAFP** of Atchison, Kansas as the 2019 Kansas Family Physician of the Year.

Dr. Eplee has practiced family medicine in Atchison for 38 years. He is a board certified family physician. Dr. Eplee has built his practice on these principles as a family physician: 1.) active listening to his patients 2.) providing continuity of care for his patients; and 3.) advocating for patients from cradle to grave.

In addition to his work as a family physician, Dr. Eplee is the representative for Kansas District 63. He is in his second term as a representative in the Kansas House of Representatives. Representative John Eplee MD serves as Vice Chair of the House Health & Human Services Committee this legislative session.

Dr. Eplee grew up in Fredonia, Kansas. He studied pre-medicine and psychology at Kansas State University, Manhattan. Following K-State, Eplee earned his medical degree from the University of Kansas School of Medicine in Kansas City. He went on to complete his residency with Via Christi Family Medicine Residency at St. Joseph Medical Center, Wichita.

Commitment to Patients

Dr. Eplee puts the “family” in family physician. He says when treating patients, “I frequently explain that this treatment, this medication, or simply this education, is the same I would want for any of my own family members. After all, the patient in our exam room is an important part of my ‘practice family.’ When we complete our office visit, they know I’m treating them like family. I don’t believe that any other medical specialty grasps this concept.”

A patient writes about an example of her trust and confidence in him as a physician: "Dr. Eplee’s vast medical knowledge was once again proven to me this year when he diagnosed my son’s 'mysterious disease' via a photo. We had seen numerous doctors/specialists and undergone several tests prior to this. We weren’t able to consult with Dr. Eplee because he was in Topeka for the legislative session at the time of my son’s illness. I became so frustrated that I sent him a photo. He emailed me immediately with the correct diagnosis!"

Rev. Dr. Rachel Dannar, Topeka, Kan., writes in her nomination letter: “Despite all his best qualities, the thing I admire most about John is that he continues to push himself to advance his knowledge and care. He does not settle for ‘always having done it that way’ mentality. He uses tried and true methods when they are the right choice, but he has kept pace with new options and new medicinal practices. John works hard to give the absolute best care for his patients and tries to stay current and connected.”



Eplee explains that he learned the business aspects of medicine “on the fly” and that the administrative business side of running a practice can direct the attention away from the patient and doctor relationship. To overcome those distractions, Eplee became an “active listener” to maintain his focus in the exam room. He said, “Active Listening is imperative to validate the patient experience and quickly make the right diagnosis.”

Continuity of care and caring for the patient cradle to grave is what family physicians do. “To mature (age) with your practice is a fascinating wonderful opportunity. Continuity allows you to forge a bond with your patients that is unbreakable. When you have delivered everyone in a family, saved the father from sepsis because of a complicated pneumonia, and then hold the hand of their grandmother as she transitions from Alzheimer’s disease you understand how transcendent your role is in that family.”

Commitment to Community and State

Dr. Eplee serves on many committees for his church and hospital and is a school board member of USD 409. He is involved with the Delta Upsilon International Fraternity Educational Foundation. In past years he has been a cub master and youth sports coach, and served on the board of directors for numerous local organizations, including the Rotary Club.

Dr. Eplee was president of the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians (KAFP) and also the Kansas Medical Society (KMS). In addition, he served as chair of the Immunize Kansas Coalition (IKC), which is comprised of immunization leaders throughout the state. His impact with these organizations was instrumental in improving the immunization rates in the state of Kansas. IKC evolved from the Governor’s Immunization Task Force formed in 1988, on which he served as a member. His collaborative work with these organizations resulted in raising all childhood immunizations rates to 90 percent and maintaining that level for several years.

As chair of the IKC he became part of a team that faced the challenges of very low Kansas immunization rates for adolescents: specifically HPV and meningitis. These rates have improved remarkably in the past two years since his leadership. Dr. Eplee steadfastly maintains that today's vaccinations save more lives and positively impact population health greater than anything else in our modern world other than clean drinking water.

All of these roles and his passion for immunizations led to his service on the Kansas House of Representatives. During his first term he authored legislation to require all immunization providers in Kansas to track immunizations utilizing WEB-IZ, an online immunization tracking program, and to add the meningitis vaccine (MCV-4) to the list of immunizations required by schools.

He was the prime mover behind legislation to require all immunization providers in Kansas to track immunizations utilizing WEB-IZ, an online immunization tracking program, and to add the meningitis vaccine (MCV-4) to the list of immunizations required by schools. Dr. Eplee is working closely with Tobacco Free Kansas Coalition and KAFP in efforts to raise the legal age of purchasing tobacco products from 18 to 21 and was instrumental in gaining the opportunity to hold informational hearings in both the House and Senate Committees related to health.

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Dr. Lynn Fisher, Plainville, writes, “I witnessed his passion for advancing immunizations, protecting family physicians scope of practice from other health care providers, and collaborating with other medical specialties in the house of medicine to advocate for patient care. And now, maybe in his greatest act of service to us, he is part of the Kansas Legislature. Here, he is a voice for Kancare expansion and for expanding access to vaccines.”

Advocate for Patients

Dr. Eplee says, “I learned early on that advocacy starts in the exam room as you actively listen, providing continuity in our patients’ care, and ultimately advocate for them for the correct diagnostic test, the right medicine and occasionally the best referral for specialized care.”

Dannar writes: “I have never met a person like Dr. John Eplee in my ministry before. I would highly recommend this physician to you as an outstanding example of what it means to be a family physician, to care for those in need of his service, and to reach beyond his practice by seeing it more as calling in life and less as job to be done. Dr. Eplee is the epitome of what it means to be a servant leader and I am honored to be his pastor and to have him as my family’s physician.”

Atchison City Manager Becky Berger writes: “Although his work within the Atchison community is substantial and merit worthy on its own grounds. In my role as city manager I’ve developed an even greater admiration and respect for Dr. Eplee while working with him as our state representative. I’ve seen first-hand his tireless work in Topeka to further legislation that improve the lives of all his constituents. Despite being one of the busiest people I know, he is always responsive.”

Recognition and Honor

Dr. Eplee will be honored at the KAFP Annual Meeting “Connect. Interact. Learn.” in Wichita on Friday, June 7, 2019 during the President’s Dinner as the 2019 Kansas Family Physician of the Year.

2019 Kansas Family Physician of the Year finalists included: Mark Basham, MD (Eureka); Edward Hett, MD, FAAFP (Wichita); J. Michael Patton, MD, FAAFP (Wichita); Nick Tomsen, MD (Wichita) and Belinda Vail, MD, FAAFP (Kansas City).

KAFP has presented the Kansas Family Physician of the Year award since 1990. Past recipients are listed on the KAFP website at: <https://www.kafponline.org/FPOYrecipients>

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About the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians

Founded in 1948, the KAFP represents 1,760 physicians and medical students statewide. It is the only medical society in Kansas devoted solely to primary care. A family physician takes care of the whole family, all ages, both sexes, each organ system and every disease entity. Research has proven that people with access to primary care have better health outcomes than those who do not. In Kansas, approximately one-half of family physicians practice in non-metropolitan areas. Over 25 percent treat uninsured patients, especially children and families receiving public assistance. The mission of the KAFP is to support and serve family physicians of Kansas as they advance the health of Kansans. For more information visit the KAFP website at www.kafponline.org.