



NORTH MISSISSIPPI
MEDICAL CENTER

Growing our own...

Career paths often take many twists and turns, but for two local physicians, their destination was clear from the start.

Drs. Brad Crosswhite, a family physician with Barnes Crossing Medical Clinic, and Ashley Harris, a geriatric physician with IMA-Tupelo, both knew they wanted a career in medicine from an early age.



Brad Crosswhite, M.D.

Tupelo native Brad Crosswhite, M.D., set his sights on a medical career when he was in middle school. Growing up with a dad who is a pharmacist helped spark his interest in medicine, but it was his first overseas

mission trip that sealed the deal.

After graduating from Tupelo High School in 1999, Dr. Crosswhite went to Honduras and put his Spanish to work translating for a physician. "I followed the doctor around for a week as he treated patients during that mission trip," he said. "It was the best hands-on experience. He taught me all kinds of stuff."

That fall he entered David Lipscomb University in Nashville to pursue bachelor's degrees in biology and Spanish. The summer after his freshman year, he worked in Surgery at North Mississippi Medical Center. "I helped get instruments and prep patients... anything they wanted me to do," he said. "I watched a lot of cases."

After graduation, he completed his medical degree at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson. Then he moved to Tupelo for three years of residency training at NMMC's Family Medicine Residency Center in Tupelo, where he also served as chief resident.

Since 1999, Dr. Crosswhite has made 18 mission trips to Honduras and credits those ventures with influencing his career as a family physician. "Through mission work, you see patients of all ages with all types of medical issues," he said. "While medical specialties are fascinating, I realized that I like treating 'all' of a patient and taking care of their family members as well. You really get a feel for their family dynamics."

Dr. Crosswhite's advice for young people who aspire to a medical career? "If you are dedicated and passionate about caring for people, this may be the job for you," he said. "The most important thing is to focus and be self-disciplined."



Ashley Harris, M.D.

Ashley Harris, M.D., grew up in Water Valley shadowing his great-uncle, Dr. Paul Odom, who has practiced family medicine for 50 years.

"If you had asked my family from the time I was about 13 years old, they would have told you I was going to become a doctor," Dr. Harris said. "I remember being at family gatherings when I was young and him getting paged to go take care of someone. I was always curious about what he did."

During summer breaks from school, he would work at Dr. Odom's clinic and make rounds with him at the hospital and nursing home. "I saw the relationships he had with people and how he meant so much to his patients," Dr. Harris said. "I realized how much he impacted their lives."

Between his junior and senior years of high school, he participated in the Rural Medical Scholars program at Mississippi State University in Starkville, where he took college classes and shadowed area physicians.

After graduation, Dr. Harris majored in biochemistry at MSU. After his third year, he participated in NMMC's Physician Shadowing Program, where he spent the summer observing family physicians, cardiologists and other specialists in their clinics and hospital practice. "Before you make a commitment to all that training and education, you really need the hands-on experience of shadowing to see what it is really like to be a physician," he said.

Dr. Harris went on to earn his medical degree from the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson. He then completed three years of residency training at NMMC's Family Medicine Residency Center in Tupelo. Because the population is aging, he decided to pursue a clinical geriatrics fellowship at Harvard University. With that training complete, he joined the staff at IMA-Tupelo.

"Practicing geriatrics allows me to try to improve a person's quality of life and function," he said. "I get to help people with the sometimes difficult transition of aging. This is a great opportunity for me to try to make a difference."

Dr. Harris offers this advice to students considering a medical career: "Medical school is very competitive. If you can show an admissions counselor that you have a commitment beyond what's typical by giving up your summer for hands-on experiences, then you are proving that you will go out of your way to reach your goals."