

## KIRSTEN MAGOWAN, MD '87, HS '90

## Caring for Generations of CNY Children

As a pediatric resident at Upstate in the late 1980s, Kirsten Magowan, MD '87, HS '90, routinely treated children with meningitis. "Probably a couple of kids a week," she recalls.

Then, in 1992, the first major vaccine against meningitis was introduced, resulting in significant reduction of the Hib strain of bacterial meningitis. "Suddenly, we weren't seeing those patients anymore. It was an incredible shift," she says.

It is frustrating now, more than 30 years later, to encounter vaccine hesitancy among parents in her North Syracuse, New York, pediatric practice. "I have seen where we were and I don't want to go back," she says. "Very often I can talk them through it by sharing that perspective but sometimes they just don't want to listen."

Other changes include a propensity in Internet self-diagnoses and a rise in mental illness in young patients. "Prescribing medication for mental illness had not been part of my training. I had to take classes to take on that responsibility because there's a shortage of pediatric psychiatrists to refer to," she says.

Despite evolving challenges, Magowan remains devoted to her patients. "I love the kids and watching them grow up. I've seen quite a few patients now from birth until they leave me at age 18. And then some of them come back with their babies, and that is the coolest thing," she says.

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Magowan moved to Central New York as a youngster when her father took a job as an English professor at SUNY Binghamton.

She was born with a congenital hip dislocation and became interested in a career in physical therapy because of her own experiences. "Physical therapists got to play with kids and to use the swimming pool, so I thought that was a neat job," she says.

As a high school junior, her Explorer Post spent the day in the local hospital and Magowan chose to go to the physical therapy unit. "There were no kids or swimming pool," she says. "I decided to rethink my career choice."

As Magowan was graduating from high school, her father took a sabbatical year to return to Scotland. She delayed starting college to go along and spent the year working as a nurse's aide at a children's hospital. "I learned that I enjoyed the children and the hospital, but also that I wanted to be the doctor and able to do more," she says. "I also learned never to leave a messy room behind for a nurse to clean up."

After earning her undergraduate degree in biochemistry from SUNY Binghamton, Magowan came to Upstate. Despite keeping an open mind during clinical rotations, she found herself drawn to pediatrics. "There's just something different about pediatrics and this is where I fit," she says.

Magowan interviewed at residency programs across the country, thinking this would be an opportunity for her and her husband (she married her college sweetheart during her second year of medical school) to experience someplace different. "But I came



Kirsten Magowan, MD '87, HS '90 (center), with daughters Elizabeth Magowan, MD '17, and Colleen Magowan '27

back realizing that none of the programs were better than what Upstate had right here," she says.

After training, Magowan worked for other pediatricians while having her own children, eventually taking over the practice of a retiring pediatrician.

She was only two years out of residency when she was nominated to join the board of the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation and has remained involved for 32 years, serving as president from 2002 to 2004.

"When you're in private practice, you don't have the same connection to the institution, so this has been a good way to keep in touch with the heart of the University and the residency programs," she says.

Magowan and her husband, a musician who owns a balloon business, have four children. Son David and daughter Mary followed the music pathway like their father. The other two daughters went into medicine. Elizabeth Magowan, MD '17, recently joined the Upstate faculty as assistant professor of surgery after completing a surgical residency and fellowship. Colleen Magowan '27 is a second-year medical student in the Norton College of Medicine.

"They could have gone anywhere and, like me, they chose to be close to home," she says. "It's nice to share our Upstate connection and it will be fun because we'll celebrate the same reunion year."

—Renée Gearhart Levy

***If you are interested in learning more about the Medical Alumni Foundation Board, please contact Paul Norcross, executive director, at [norcrospp@upstate.edu](mailto:norcrospp@upstate.edu).***