

TERESA MILLER, MD '79

Supporting Mindful Practice

In 2019, psychiatrist Teresa Miller, MD '79, attended a four-day Mindful Practice in Medicine Retreat developed by the University of Rochester, where she completed residency training. Although she'd long been a practitioner of mindfulness herself, and advocated meditation as a part of her approach to treating her patients to appreciate the mind-body connection, she saw how valuable the experience was for her healthcare colleagues.

"Healthcare professionals from all over the world come to attend this retreat, which allows them to bond with each other, share mutual challenges, and feel like they're in it together to help their patients," she says.

Approaching the time in her career when thoughts of leaving a meaningful legacy become more important, Dr. Miller realized that making this experience available to physicians just starting out could be an important way to pay it forward. "The Mindful Practice Retreat provides an opportunity to learn how to meditate, the importance of diet emphasizing simply prepared fresh foods, and about many other things one needs to do to be a healthy practitioner," she says. "I believe if you're healthy in mind and body yourself as a psychiatrist, it's more likely that you'll be able to manage the stresses that come with a medical practice, and to help your patients learn those same important coping skills."

This year, Miller and her husband, John Goeke, have established funds at both the Upstate Medical University and the University of Rochester to support psychiatry residents who wish to attend the retreat.

"I am grateful for my medical education at Upstate and residency training at Rochester that provided the foundation for a wonderful career," she says. "I can't imagine doing anything else."

As a high school student, Miller enjoyed studying science. She was drawn to helping others through her volunteer work at the Rome Developmental Center and at Oneida City Hospital. That sparked an interest in medicine, which was strongly encouraged by her parents. She attended Wells College in Aurora, New York, then came to Upstate. Though she first pursued a residency in obstetrics and gynecology, she realized the reason she'd been attracted to OB/GYN was because she enjoyed talking with her female patients about their issues. "I transferred to the University of Rochester for a residency in psychiatry instead," she says.

After practicing in the Rochester area for several years, she and Goeke found a house on Cayuga Lake in Aurora, near where she attended college. "There is a paucity of

psychiatrists in rural areas and I wanted to serve a population that was no less deserving of thoughtful care," she says.

Miller now works part-time providing a mind-body holistic approach to her practice. "I've had many patients tell me that I'm the only physician who puts everything together for them," she says. "I take the time to review their physical issues and lab studies, and I follow the research to help them to attain the best health they can attain. We talk about exercise, sleep, meditation, healthy diet, and social interaction. I really enjoy it and will continue as long as I can."

She has been supported throughout her career by her husband's involvement as a partner and office manager in her practice. He was equally supportive of creating the Dr. Teresa R. Miller Psychiatry Resident Wellness Fund at Upstate Medical University and at Rochester. "By providing resources and support for psychiatry residents to cultivate mindfulness and prioritize their own wellness, we are not only investing in their individual well-being but also in the quality of care they will provide to their patients throughout their careers," he says. "At this point in our lives, it's nice to be able to see the results of our gift in action."

The Upstate Fund currently supports one psychiatry resident to attend the retreat annually, which will be matched by the Department of Psychiatry so a second resident can attend. As the fund grows, it will be able to support additional residents who wish to participate. Miller plans to make additional contributions should her initial grant prove to be a meaningful asset to third and fourth year residents. "We hope that this will extend beyond the psychiatry specialty," she says. "Taking care of yourself first is the best way to ensure that you can take care of other people, regardless of which branch of medicine one chooses."

—Renée Gearhart Levy



Teresa Miller, MD '79 and husband, John Goeke