



Distinguished Alumnus

Mark L. Wolraich, MD '70

Mark L. Wolraich, MD '70, is a pioneering figure in developmental and behavioral pediatrics who fundamentally shaped the understanding and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and championed an interdisciplinary approach to caring for children with developmental and behavioral challenges.

Dr. Wolraich's contributions to pediatric medicine extend far beyond clinical care. He developed the widely used Vanderbilt ADHD Rating Scale, conducted groundbreaking research debunking myths about sugar and hyperactivity, and played a pivotal role in establishing developmental and behavioral pediatrics as a recognized subspecialty. His work has influenced pediatric

practice worldwide and improved the lives of countless children and families.

Wolraich grew up in the New York City area, first in the Bronx and then on Long Island. He graduated from SUNY Harpur College (now Binghamton University), where he majored in chemistry before moving on to medical school. While at Upstate, he was drawn to pediatrics through the influence of three important mentors. Julius Richmond, MD, at the time dean of the College of Medicine and chair of the Department of Pediatrics, had recently returned to Upstate from his work with Betty Caldwell developing the national HeadStart Program. From him, Wolraich learned how physicians can influence government programs. Another important mentor

was Howard Weinberger, MD '58, who interested Wolraich in clinical research. His third mentor, Ted Debono, MD, exposed Wolraich to children with developmental disabilities and an interdisciplinary approach to their care.

Of all his medical school rotations, pediatrics resonated most strongly. By his internship year, he knew he wanted to specialize in caring for children with developmental disabilities, drawn to the need for coordinated care that addressed not just medical needs but educational requirements as well.

Following an intern year at Upstate, Wolraich served two years in the Public Health Service at the Phoenix Indian Hospital during the Vietnam War era. This experience exposed him to diverse Native American populations and reinforced his commitment to comprehensive, culturally sensitive care. He completed his residency at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, followed by a fellowship in "care of handicapped children" (now called developmental and behavioral pediatrics) at the University of Oregon Medical School.

Wolraich's first faculty appointment was at the University of Iowa Hospital School, where he was able to practice, teach, and conduct research in an interdisciplinary setting with a particular focus on children with spina bifida and with ADHD, launching a remarkable academic career spanning over four decades. During his 14 years at Iowa,



Wolraich and his wife Debra at a book signing for his ADHD book at an American Academy of Pediatrics meeting

he advanced to full professor while establishing himself as a leading researcher. He developed innovative programs, including a summer program for adolescents with physical disabilities, and began his groundbreaking research on diet and behavior.

One of Wolraich's most significant contributions was his rigorous study debunking the persistent myth linking sugar intake to hyperactivity. Using a carefully controlled design where families received all their food during the study period, his team found no relationship between sugar consumption and children's behavior or learning. "It was really a definitive negative study," he says.

In 1990, Wolraich moved to Vanderbilt University Medical School as director of the Division of Child Development. In addition to expanding the Division's clinical services and the research and training programs during his 11 years at Vanderbilt, he completed the development of the ADHD rating scale. He named it the Vanderbilt Scale, and it is widely used throughout the world. Along with colleagues from the Society for Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics (SDBP), he worked to facilitate the approval of Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics as a new subspecialty in pediatrics, and also served as president of SDBP.

In 2000, Wolraich accepted an endowed chair at the University of Oklahoma, becoming the Shawn Walters Professor of Pediatrics. He spent the final 20 years of his career



Wolraich met Debra during his senior year in college and they married during his second year at Upstate.

expanding services, research, and educational programs for children with disabilities throughout the state. One of the programs he developed was a service navigation program for children with disabilities that now serves most of the counties in Oklahoma.

Throughout his career, Wolraich was active in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), where he helped develop training for pediatricians in the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. He played a major role in the development and subsequent revisions of the Academy's ADHD Guidelines, and authored the Academy's books for parents on toilet training and on ADHD. He also edited the AAP's Classification of Child and Adolescent Mental Diagnoses in Primary Care.

Wolraich's contributions have been recognized with many prestigious awards, including the C. Anderson Aldrich Award from the American Academy of Pediatrics, induction into the CHADD Hall of Fame, and the Career Achievement

Award from the Society for Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics. His scholarly output includes 24 books, 111 articles, and 50 chapters.

Since retiring in 2020, Dr. Wolraich continues contributing to pediatric care through training programs with the REACH Institute. He and his wife Debra have relocated to Connecticut, where they enjoy outdoor activities and spending more time with their children and grandchildren.

"I really cherish the interdisciplinary approach I learned at Upstate," Wolraich says. "It shaped everything I did throughout my career and helped countless children receive the comprehensive care they deserved."



Wolraich received the Presidential Professorship Award from the University of Oklahoma in 2010.