Being a physician isn’t just a job for Edward Cody, MD. It’s a calling, and just one of the many ways he serves his community.

Doctor Cody, who spent 30 years as a family physician at Medical Associates of Beaver Dam until retiring last May, isn’t just a doctor. He’s also an ordained deacon in the Roman Catholic church, where he performs wedding ceremonies, funerals, and baptisms. Guiding others toward a life of kindness, generosity, and thoughtfulness is an important part of this work. So is working toward social justice and helping those in need: the poor and the sick, those who are isolated, and those who are simply unlucky. These goals form the cornerstone of his personality, too.

While Dr Cody’s guidance happens in subtle ways, through gentle advice and casual conversations, it doesn’t go unnoticed. In fact, his efforts have made such a mark on his community that he was selected for the Wisconsin Medical Society’s 2009 Physician Citizen of the Year Award, which annually recognizes a physician who demonstrates a commitment to his or her community through volunteer work or charitable activities. Doctor Cody accepted the award November 19 at a ceremony hosted by the Dodge County Medical Society, which he attended with his wife, Coletta.

Nominated by his longtime Medical Associates partner and personal physician, Tim Rentmeester, MD, Dr Cody was selected for the award not only for his many acts of service but because he understands just how important it is for the medical profession to give back to the friends, families, and neighbors that sustain it.

“Helping people in need is something I think we’re called to do as physicians,” he says. “There are so many problems out there that are much worse than what we’ll ever experience, so those of us who can help out should. It makes a difference, and it’s something that makes you feel good at the end of the day.”

Doctor Cody describes physicians as a gifted group of people with an extraordinary set of talents. With this comes a responsibility to use these talents to their fullest and in a way that benefits many.

Each week for the past 10 years, Dr Cody has used his talents as a teacher and listener at the Fox Lake Correctional Institution, where he leads a study group and chats with the inmates about what’s going on in the world outside the prison. In the process, the inmates get to share what their lives are like and work through personal struggles.
For several years, Dr Cody has also taken his talents to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, where he has helped rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina with a group of volunteers from his parish.

“It’s a powerful experience,” he says of this work. “Even today, when you walk down the street, you’ll see one home that’s reconstructed and one next door that’s gutted. There is a great need [for service] there.”

In addition, Dr Cody donated his time to the Boy Scouts of America for many years, serving as a troop leader for 5 years and a committee member for another 4. He also volunteered as Medical Director for the Beaver Dam School District and the Continental Manor nursing home in Randolph for many years and served on the board of Interfaith Volunteers, an organization that matches individuals with elderly neighbors who need help with day-to-day activities such as grocery shopping, lawn care, and snow removal.

“There are many ways physicians can and do get involved in their communities to make a difference in the lives of their patients,” said Wisconsin Medical Society President Robert Jaeger, MD. “But Doctor Cody’s efforts are truly inspiring. The breadth of his involvement and commitment to his community make him an outstanding role model for all of us seeking to make our own communities stronger, safer, and healthier.”

While it’s very difficult for busy physicians to find time for a break, not to mention other activities, Dr Cody was able to make it work. He says a ready-fire-aim approach helped make volunteering a reality, despite his full schedule.

“You always have this time-pressure feeling when you’re working, but these [volunteer opportunities] would fall in a way that worked,” he says. “It’s like a spiritual advisor of mine once said: ‘If you just keep showing up, it will work out.’”

While this approach of persistence certainly helped, Dr Cody also recognizes that the support of his wife and her persistence to be involved made it all happen.

“My wife is the one who really kept me involved and encouraged me to get more involved with my faith,” he says. “We’ve been married 33 years, and she’s made all of this possible. I’m so grateful for the opportunity to serve, and to do it with her.”
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