

Gaines Mimms, MD: Doctor, Mentor, Donor

You could say that Gaines Mimms' destiny was set at birth – or soon thereafter. His dad, an attorney, gave him only two choices for his career: practice medicine or become a lawyer.

An obedient son, he chose the former, following in the footsteps of his great-great grandfather, a surgeon general for the Confederate Army, and his grandfather, also a surgeon.



Brigitte and Gaines Mimms, MD

"I'm lucky, I love what I do, but I did it for all the wrong reasons," says Dr. Mimms, sitting in his office at Morristown Memorial, his ancestors' sheepskin medical school diplomas hanging nearby. More easygoing with his four children, he is nonetheless pleased that his son, Remy, intends to carry on the family legacy.

Known around the hospital campus as much for his genial manner as for his signature bowties, Dr. Mimms began his career here 25 years ago. Venturing across the Hudson River with his wife and newborn daughter for a job interview, the new neonatologist may as well have been entering a foreign country. The family got lost along the winding roads of Mendham and was astounded by the picturesque countryside.

"I had no idea this whole world existed," he recalls. "I took the job; to this day I don't know why I said yes." If it wasn't the irresistible tranquility of the area, perhaps it was the hospital's promise that the one-room Special Care Nursery would become its own center of excellence. At that time, premature sick babies were transported to better equipped facilities.

"The moms would stay here, and the babies were taken by ambulance to New York hospitals," he says. "It was sad. Most of the mothers were not awake; they were still under anesthesia. It was the goal of Morristown Memorial to create a neonatology center so that sick newborns could be cared for in the community and not transferred out."

The hospital backed its commitment by providing financial resources and specialized training. "It required a culture change," he says. "The majority of care for very sick babies is ancillary: pediatric nurses, social workers, radiologists, pharmacists, laboratory technicians. It's a fragile patient population, and the hospital graciously made all of these services part of the care for these babies. A whole infrastructure was developed to create a safety net to care for premature sick infants."

In honor of Dr. Mimms' silver anniversary with Morristown Memorial and the opening of Sam's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit – a \$15 million premiere family-friendly facility – he and his wife, Brigitte, joined the Brookfield Society, bequeathing a charitable gift annuity to the hospital. "I owe a lot to Morristown Memorial; I've had a phenomenal career and that's why I give back," says the Health Foundation trustee. "The hospital opened up my career as a doctor and introduced me to teaching. It's been a privilege to take care of children and their families."

To his students, the privilege is theirs. When Dr. Mimms speaks, his enthusiasm and passion create such an infectious mix that it's no wonder he has collected a cluster of teaching awards. As pediatric clerkship director, he organizes the pediatric rotation for medical students from Mount Sinai School of Medicine and The Mount Sinai Hospital and St. George's University School of Medicine. It's a role he cherishes: "There's power in the transfer of information, but I'm also passing on the image of a physician. It's more than knowledge, it's teaching the whole manner of the profession, a transfer of respect."

And of course there's pragmatic advice to share too. Those bowties? Cheaper than neckties – important when paying off medical school loans. Plus, they don't get in the way when examining patients. "I tell the medical students that I only wear long ties when I am in a bad mood," teases Dr. Mimms, "so they know when to hide from me."

Hard to imagine, though, as he opens his door and warmly greets two medical students camped outside his office, eagerly awaiting his tutelage.

-Alice Roche Cody