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Alliance ENT and Hearing Center

A Passion for Quality Care

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By Mark Crawford

Anthony Rieder, M.D., a successful nuclear power engineer, had just finished a multimillion dollar project and was walking back to his cubicle when he wondered, “Is this what I really want to do with my life?” “I was really struggling with this decision,” says Dr. Rieder. “One day my wife asked me, ‘If you could do anything, what would it be?’ I said, ‘I’d like to be a doctor.’”

That was in 1994. Soon afterward, Dr. Rieder enrolled in the remaining courses he needed to gain admission to medical school, while continuing to work for Wisconsin Electric. Four years later, he graduated from the Medical College of Wisconsin and then completed his residency in otolaryngology in 2005.

After working with several group practices, Dr. Rieder established Alliance ENT and Hearing Center in Milwaukee in 2006. His specialties are general ENT and related surgery, including head and neck cancer, disorders of the thyroid and parathyroid

glands, ear, sinus and facial plastics. Image guidance and balloon sinuplasty are some of the state-of-the-art techniques he uses for sinus surgery. Audiology, hearing aids and balance services are also part of his services.

Unlike many ENTs, Dr. Rieder is deeply experienced in sleep medicine and sleep surgery. He operates two dedicated sleep clinics and manages patients with traditional continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), oral appliances and surgery. Sleep studies, in hospital lab settings or at home with portable equipment, can provide the high-value information needed for establishing viable, long-term treatment plans.

“I work with dentists, behavioral psychologists and other more traditional sleep physicians, such as psychiatrists, pulmonologists and neurologists, to provide the entire range of services for patients with sleep disorders,” says Dr. Rieder.

Dr. Anthony Rieder and Dr. Alex Romashko discuss an upcoming patient surgery.





Mitzi Johnson, a registered sleep technician, applies CPAP to a patient during a sleep study. CPAP is used to treat patients with obstructed sleep apnea and promote healthy sleep.

Common sleep disorders are insomnia, restless legs syndrome, narcolepsy, shift work sleep disorder and obstructive sleep apnea. “Over the last five years, our knowledge curve on how lack of sleep impacts our daily lives has increased tremendously,” says Dr. Rieder. “Snoring, for example, is more than just a social problem — it is often a symptom of obstructive sleep apnea, where breathing actually stops temporarily during sleep. This condition greatly increases the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack and stroke. I see many patients in their 30s with heart issues because they have developed sleep apnea.” Sleep apnea can usually be treated with CPAP management, oral appliances and/or surgery.

A COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Dr. Rieder shares his office space with two other ENTs, Dr. Alex Romashko and Dr. Rich Lindstrom. “We work together by helping with call coverage, patient coverage/overflow for when individual clinics are full or when a doctor is not in the office or on vacation,” indicates Dr. Rieder.

All three physicians are trained in the latest techniques for the treatment of sinus disease, and occasionally do larger surgical procedures together, such as thyroid surgery or head and neck cancer procedures.

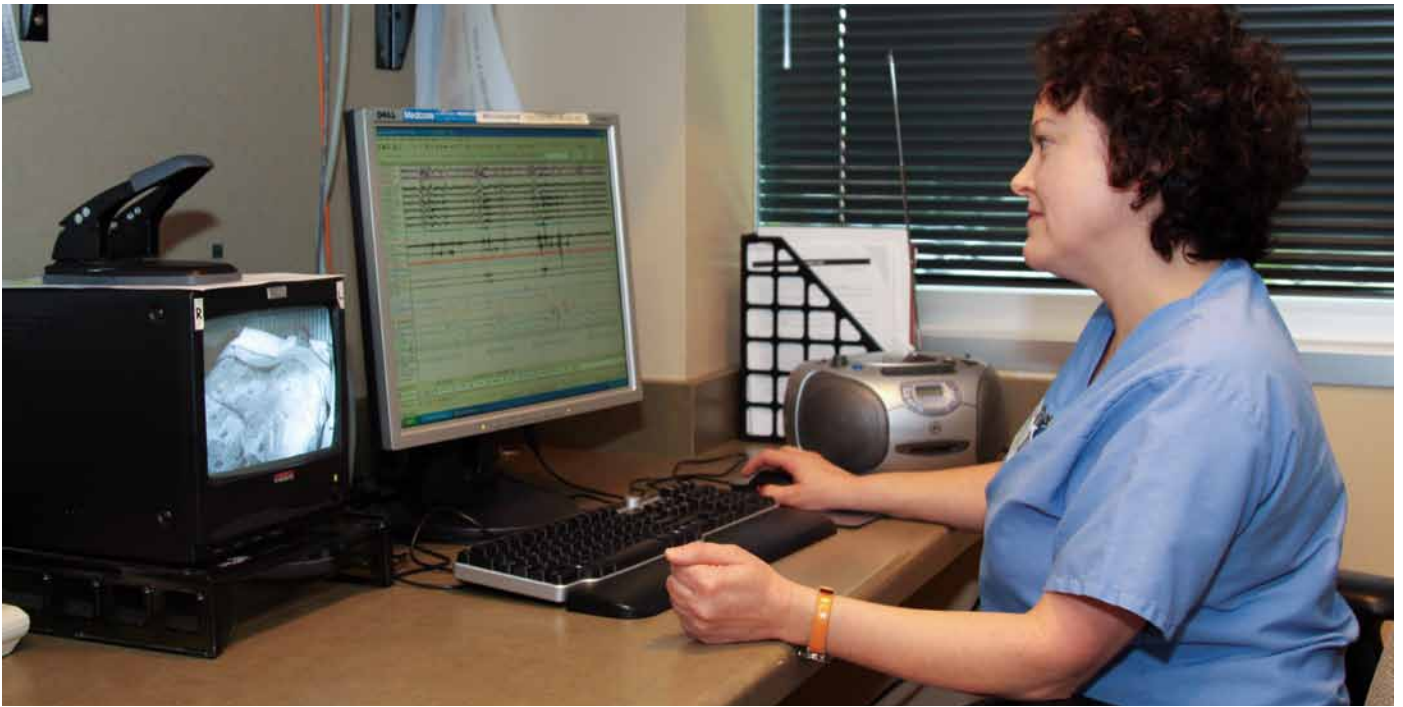
“We each have our own areas of expertise,” says Dr. Rieder. “Dr. Romashko is an outstanding head and neck cancer surgeon.

Dr. Lindstrom practices ENT allergy, so I often refer to him for allergy testing and immunotherapy for my allergy and sinus patients. I practice sleep medicine and provide a full range of treatment options.”

This unique working relationship is rare in the medical world because there is no financial business relationship between them. “Each of our practices could be considered competitive with the other because all three of us practice general ENT,” says Dr. Rieder. “However, we choose to support and assist each other for the benefit of our patients, and accessibility to services that alone, we may not be able to offer. We trust each other, and know that our patients will receive excellent care by a clinician if we aren’t available to care for them.”

An unusual skill set, Dr. Rieder brings to his practice his engineering approach to operations and problem solving. “I enjoy working directly with my patients and approaching their problems in a systematic and logical approach, much like solving a problem in engineering,” he indicates. Dr. Rieder frequently uses physics and engineering examples, and how they apply to human anatomy, to explain surgeries and treatment plans to his patients.

As an engineer, Dr. Rieder was constantly evaluating work flow, process improvement, cost effectiveness and efficiency. He was also trained as an ISO 9000 lead auditor for quality in the nuclear power industry.



Sleep tech Mitzi Johnson monitors the progress of a patient in the Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare – St. Joseph's Sleep Lab.

“I constantly speak about work flow, process improvement and customer satisfaction with my office staff,” says Dr. Rieder. “I am always looking for best practices that can be applied to my own work; they can be from the medical field, other industries or even my neighbor. If a practice works, I’ll

Clinic manager Cindi Kroneberg is eager to support Dr. Rieder’s patients and medical colleagues at Alliance ENT and Hearing Center.



use it to provide the best possible service to my internal and external customers.”

One of those best practices is the paperless office. Alliance ENT and Hearing Center recently converted to electronic patient records, e-documents and e-prescriptions. “We looked at our practice needs and found an electronic medical record [EMR] system [Glo-stream] that is highly versatile and adaptable,” says Dr. Rieder. “My office staff was trained over a three-day period and went live in just one week, and we never cancelled or reduced a clinic or surgery day. This is uncommon, and most EMR vendors will tell you that it will take months to do this. Not only are we more efficient, we are reducing our paper consumption and saving trees.”

STAYING INDEPENDENT

After working in the energy industry and as a physician with two group medical practices, Dr. Rieder prefers being an independent practitioner. “I like making my own business management decisions,” he says. “My experience working in a large corporation pushed me towards owning my own business. I don’t have to develop detailed business plans to determine all my business and marketing decisions. I like to look ahead and predict what needs to happen or change in my practice to continue to be successful. I can help my patients in making their medical decisions, but also support them through difficult emotional and financial times. For example, if one of my families can’t make their payments, pay their bill or if, heaven forbid, they die from their illness or other tragedy, I have the ability as a business owner to determine how I help them. I can make these decisions without



Alliance ENT and Hearing Center offers full diagnostic and exam services for ear, nose and throat disorders. Dr. Rieder is seen examining a patient's ear with a microscope.

any discussion with an administrator or billing office. Many physicians have grown tired of the business part of practicing medicine, or they never cared for it to begin with, and that is why they choose physician employment.”

The gradual loss of independent physicians to larger organizations changes the dynamics of how medicine is practiced. The employment status of a physician (especially primary care) often dictates the patient referral pattern between physicians.

“If the primary care physician is employed by a health system, there is usually tremendous pressure to refer to certain specialists within the hospital system — either to other employed specialists or to those physicians that will utilize the resources and ancillary services of the hospital system,” says Dr. Rieder.

This can have a large impact on how a practice manages a patient's illness or provides surgical services. If a physician does not utilize the hospital system services when referring a patient, it is considered a financial loss or “leakage” from the system. The switch of large numbers of independent practices to large health systems also has a direct impact on the vendors that supply services to smaller practices, groups or solo physicians, creating a smaller customer pool for these vendors.

Staying independent, of course, means Dr. Rieder must manage all aspects of his practice. Although this requires more time, he still enjoys collaborating one on one with medical colleagues, vendors, employers and health systems to custom-design programs and lines of service that benefit each patient. “I want to

be able to develop an idea or concept, and then make it real and functional,” he says. “I can do this with the collaboration I have with my colleagues.”

In an effort to help other small-practice physicians stay independent, Dr. Rieder launched MedWisconsin in early 2009, an Internet site and portal that will provide tools for independent physicians to network, share information and support each other through collaboration. Plans are underway to design a secure messaging system that will provide a backbone for health information exchange and clinical inte-

On-site audiologists Rebecca Landgraft and Terri Kirchner provide a full complement of audiology and balance services, including the most advanced hearing aids and accessories available.





Dr. Rieder and Dr. Romashko assist each other during a patient's surgery. Both surgeons utilize image-guidance systems to ensure greater precision and safety during sinus surgery.

gration, "much in the same way that large health systems or other accountable organizations are attempting to do," adds Dr. Rieder. "We want to be able to give small practices the tools to continue to compete and be financially viable." Hopefully, they can slow down or reverse the trend of independent physicians leaving private practice and joining health systems or large employed medical groups.

MedWisconsin only works with vendors and technology sources that understand that "we can only be successful if

we collaborate and support each other, and not consider each other as competition or just another sale or source of revenue," stresses Dr. Rieder. He recently recruited Kristin Habanek to function as MedWisconsin's Executive Director. She has an extensive background in engineering and sales, and will be actively contacting and recruiting physicians and vendors.

MedWisconsin will hopefully be a way for independent physicians to access the business, marketing and practice resources they need to remain competitive and viable. "Our ultimate goal is to give independent physicians a support structure and ability to adopt technology in an efficient manner that meets their work flow and practice needs," concludes Dr. Rieder. "We think that we can support them as colleagues, and also help them make wise decisions when it comes to practice development or incorporating technology into their practices." ■



We provide comprehensive medical and surgical treatment for pediatric and adult patients in:

- Otolology - disease of the ear
- Audiology
- Fitting and service of hearing aids
- Sleep medicine
- Rhinology - disorders of the nose and sinus
- Laryngology - voice and swallowing disorders
- Head and neck

At Alliance ENT and Hearing Center, our mission is to provide unique health solutions and accessible high quality medical care. We respond to the needs of our patients and community partners through education and collaboration in a positive, caring and compassionate setting.

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