

2011	March 2011	May 2011	Summer 2011	August 2011
Cardiac Rehabilitation program established	Bob Mullen retired as hospital administrator; George Stover hired as new CEO	Sterling Medical Center acquired by Hospital District No. 1 of Rice County; Hospital assumed ownership of practices of Drs. James Decker, Kristi Darnauer and Stacy Dashiell	Electronic medical records process implemented at the hospital	HealthyRC initiative launched to promote local services of the hospital and RCHF

A history of Sterling Medical Center

By DEBBIE WIENS

The modular building that houses the Sterling Medical Center was built in two weeks in 1977, using funds donated for medical purposes to the City of Sterling by the Anna Smisor-Smith estate.

After the Sterling Hospital, now the Arts Center for Sterling College, closed in 1976, banker Jerome Chandler of the Farmer's State Bank approached Dr. Tom Simpson about building a clinic. Simpson had already committed to coming to Sterling to practice after his Navy stint ended in 1977, but was not wanting to practice downtown in the old building, now Michler Accounting, where Dr. Jack Dysart had his practice.

The lot for the new building was donated by the Presbyterian Church just south of the church, and a Dallas, Texas medical building company was contracted for the structure.

Simpson arrived in Sterling in 1978 and set up his practice at the Sterling Medical Center. He furnished and equipped the building with a loan from Chandler. In 1994, an expansion project added 2,000 sq. ft. of hallway, waiting room and office, and exam rooms, at a cost of \$200,000. Later, offices were added to the south side.

In 1988, overwhelmed by the business side of the practice, Simpson sold his practice to the Medical Center in Hutchinson, and the Sterling Medical Center became a satellite branch of the Hutchinson facility. "The city of Sterling has always retained ownership of the building," Simpson said. "What I sold was the contents of the building." The 1994 expansion was financed by the Hutchinson Medical Center group. After that entity broke up in 2011, the Sterling Medical Center was purchased by the Rice County Hospital District as part of their consolidation plan.

Over the years, several doctors joined Simpson at the clinic, including Dr. Roger Tobias who worked with him for a year before starting a private practice on South Grand (where his brother Curtis lives now). In 1998, Dr. Alan Davidson, D.O. became a part of the Sterling Medical Center, and in 1998, a medical school friend of his, Dr. James Decker, D.O., came to practice in Sterling as well. Simpson said they always employed a Physician's Assistant or Nurse Practitioner, and those included P.A. Dick Hamaker from 1978 to 1992. In 1994, Sterling native Debra Wolfe, ARNP, joined the staff there and stayed until 2010.

Simpson left the practice in December of 2009 and has been working part-time as an emergency room physician in Great Bend. In 2010, new physicians Dr. Stacy Dashiell and Dr. Kristina Darnauer set up practice

at the medical center.

Simpson said the consolidation of the Rice County healthcare facilities into one business entity is a good thing, and something he and long-time hospital administrator Bob Mullen had talked about frequently. "It definitely hurt the hospital to have the two clinics not be a part of the hospital," he added. There was a business advantage for doctors to refer patients to their Hutchinson partners for tests, taking revenue away from Rice County.

Simpson enjoyed his time as a family doctor, and said he kept his patient load lower than some because he felt visiting with patients was an important part of their call. He most enjoyed the obstetrics part of his practice, and is proud to have delivered more than 2,000 babies at Rice County District Hospital. When he started in 1978, office visits were \$12 or \$14, and total OB charges around \$900, he said. However, due to the cost of malpractice insurance, in 1988 Simpson was forced to stop performing sterilizations and Caesarean section

deliveries. Other county doctors also felt the bite of those costs, and had to reduce services as well.

After a successful petition drive by Simpson and other Sterling citizens, Rice County Commissioners added Sterling to the boundaries of the RC District Hospital in 1988.

Since leaving the Sterling practice, Simpson spent six months with Docs Who Care, an itinerant medical care project, where doctors travel to small towns for a week at a time, filling in for the local doctor. The rural health initiative really made him realize just why it is so difficult for small towns to keep doctors, between the minimal cultural opportunities and the pressure of a single doctor practice, he understands why wives and families might not be happy.

Medical technology has changed medicine, Simpson said, and provided layers of profit centers, contributing to the rising cost of healthcare.

"The system of healthcare we have here now is really a big advantage for the citizens of Rice County," he said.



ALISHA KOCH APRN
STERLING MEDICAL CENTER

Medical School/schools:

- Bachelor's De-

gree Union College, Lincoln NE. Masters degree Ball State University, Muncie, IN.

Specialty:

- Family practice

Why did you choose to practice in a smaller rural community as opposed to a bigger urban hospital? What sets them apart?

"Living in a smaller community is the perfect place to raise a family. The communities also tend to be more like a 'family' as well."

What do you like most about your job?

"I love that I know my patients not only on a patient/provider level, but on a personal level as well. I love watching my little patients grow. My co-workers make my workplace a very enjoyable place to be. We work well together and have the patients best interest at heart."

Alisha is married to Brandon, a systems engineer for H & B Communications. They have two children, Kinsey, age three and Chloe, age one.

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