

Strive to Be Human

As a young orthopaedic resident, Pete Scoles was bicycling across Ohio State's campus one morning when he saw something terrible: horses rolling around on the ground in a field filled with gas. He immediately called the veterinary medicine school to tell them there was a break in their refrigeration system and their horses were dying from the escaping ammonia. When the call reached the dean, who knew a good Philadelphia accent when he heard one, he grasped quickly that Scoles had never before strayed far from his East Coast roots.

"In the Midwest we sometimes have a morning phenomenon called fog," he explained to the startled resident. "Furthermore, horses roll around while they are resting to keep their weight from crushing their internal organs." Finally, he said, he had arranged for Scoles to expand his horizons by spending one year of his residency in veterinary surgery.

Peter V. Scoles, MD '70, SKMC's senior associate dean for curriculum development and research and recipient of the 2015 Alumni Achievement Award, relishes telling this story on himself. A consummately skilled surgeon who has repaired thousands of spines, a change agent who has affected the shape of medicine nationally, he remains aware that he shares the human condition, that he can be wrong, even ridiculous, and inadequate by his own exacting standards.

These standards, combined with his realistic and compassionate view of medicine, have won him admiration from peers and patients alike. Scoles takes exception, for instance, to the brand of surgery that promises a golden future to patients in all states of health. "Nonsense," says Scoles. "Most operations won't get rid of pain entirely, but they can give you a way to live your life, to keep your job and your family." His advice to patients speaks to his own goal: "Just strive to be human."

Doing the Right Thing

Scoles' standards have consistently meant doing what he sees as the right thing, whatever the cost. You can see it in his early decision to enlist in the U.S. Navy at the height of the Vietnam War. "I had a deferment," he says with typical Scoles reasoning. "My friends from high school did not. That didn't seem right."

You can see it in his determination to pursue a medical career that would allow him to teach, a path he had chosen in high school. That meant training in the wilds of the Midwest, then the location of the best residency programs oriented toward academic medicine. He could not have predicted that his time at Ohio State would include a year he loved operating in the veterinary hospital.

And you can see it in his decision years later to leave his dean's position at Case Western University to join the staff of the National Board of Medical Examiners to lead major changes to national assessment programs. He left behind what he loved most, teaching and working with students, because, he says, "When you operate, you affect one life greatly. When you teach, you affect a group of people. But when you improve regulatory systems, you contribute to society. Sometimes personal gratification must take a back seat."

A Family Affair

The oldest of five brothers, Scoles says his career in medicine was predestined. His mother idealized her older brother, Anthony F. DePalma, MD '29, a storied chairman of Jefferson's orthopaedic surgery department from 1954 to 1970, and would not have accepted any other outcome for her eldest.

In 1965, Scoles entered a program offered by Penn State University and Jefferson, which led to a combined BS/MD degree in five years. While the program requires seven years to complete today, its earlier incarnation allowed Scoles to proceed at a pace that suited his intensity.

Strongly influenced by legendary Jefferson surgeons Thomas Nealon, Jr., MD '44; Herb Cohn, MD '55; and Ed McLaughlin, MD '56, Scoles initially intended a career in

PETER V. SCOLES, MD '70, SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH AND RECIPIENT OF THE 2015 ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AWARD, AT HOME.

PHOTOS BY JIM GRAHAM.

Peter V. Scoles, MD '70

2015 Achievement Award Winner

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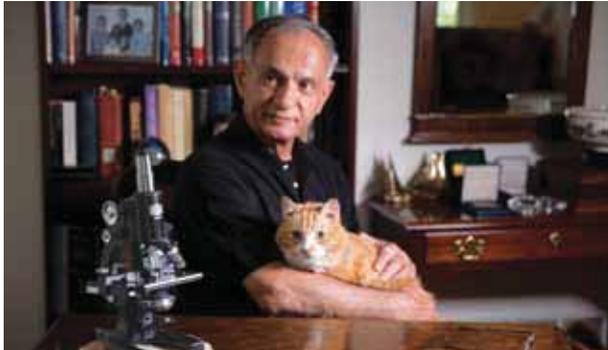
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SCOLES AND HIS CAT, RED, SIT WITH THE MICROSCOPE THAT HIS UNCLE, ANTHONY DEPALMA, MD '29, GAVE HIM.

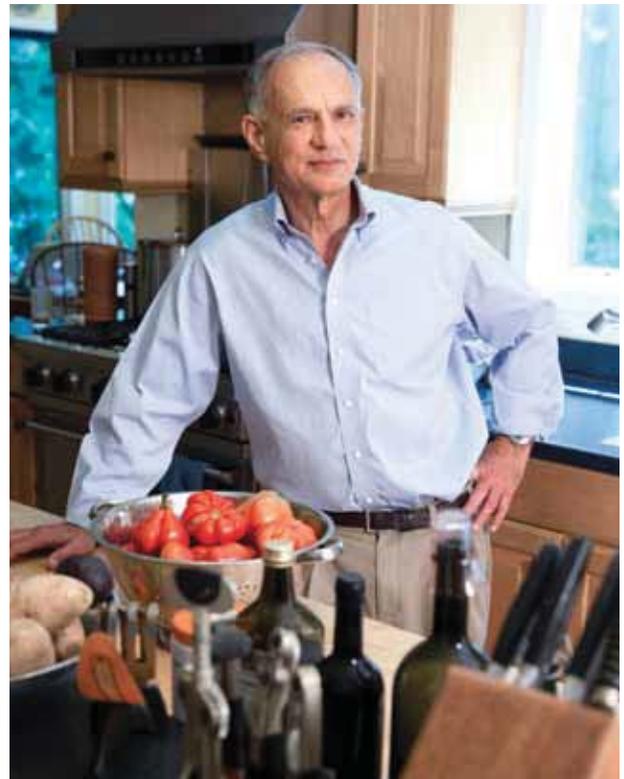
BELOW: HE WILL TURN THE HEIRLOOM TOMATOES HE GROWS INTO A CLASSIC RED SAUCE, MADE TO THE SAME STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE HE APPLIES TO ANY ENTERPRISE.

general surgery. The Navy directed Scoles into orthopaedics because, he says, “Vietnam was in full swing, and they needed orthopaedists.” The specialty became a family affair; his brother Paul also became an orthopaedist and he married orthopaedist Angela Smith, MD. To round out the picture, Scoles’ god-daughter, Lindsay, also chose orthopaedics. “Any resident who treats one of us is to be pitied,” Scoles says, in recognition of the formidable gauntlet his family represents.

Moving SKMC Forward

Scoles’ career came full circle when he returned to SKMC in 2013. He had given back to his alma mater as a trustee and remains on the board of the Alumni Association today. As a dean, he could work from the inside to set curriculum reform in motion. “Nearly everyone agrees that our current education of healthcare professionals is inefficient, expensive, duplicative and sometimes mind-numbing,” says Scoles. “Many places are working to change pieces of the puzzle, but we are looking at the whole process. We are starting with truly patient-centered care as the goal and then working backwards, and that is unique and different.”

Working closely with Steven Herrine, MD '90, vice dean of academic affairs/undergraduate medical education, Scoles put in place the foundations for JeffMD, a new curriculum named by SKMC students and slated to begin with the Class of 2021. He has now stepped back from JeffMD so he can devote more time to working on a still-larger canvas with



Mark Tykocinski, MD, who holds the chair named for Scoles’ uncle and his wife, the Anthony F. and Gertrude M. DePalma Dean of the Sidney Kimmel Medical College. The two men will bring together medical schools nationwide to talk about a more rational approach to the education of a doctor for tomorrow’s world.

Scoles takes heart from what he sees at SKMC today. “I see a proud tradition,” he says. “I also see proud graduates who accept the need for change and who want to see Jefferson move forward into the next 100 years. Only a fool would think it is going to be easy. But I see action, and that is gratifying.”  –CAROL THOMSON

To learn more about JeffMD, see *By the Numbers* on page 49.