

Dr. Kathy Swafford

2015 Southern Illinois Medical Association Favorite Daughter/Son Award

Dr. Kathy Swafford, of Anna, IL. is the 2015 Southern Illinois Medical Association Favorite Daughter Award recipient. This annual award is given to a doctor from Southern Illinois who has distinguished him or her self in a special way through a career in medicine and “for distinguished advancement towards the betterment of humankind.” Dr. Swafford has been, and continues to be a pediatrician and leader who has served and represented southern Illinois in an exemplary way.

It is particularly appropriate that we make this award to Dr. Swafford this year as our annual meeting educational component is focusing on the issue of a shortage of physicians to serve rural Illinois. As we review a portion of her work, we can all wonder who will there be to replace this generous and talented person who has dedicated her career to caring for the children in underserved southern Illinois, and who has served as a valuable resource to her physician colleagues of this region.

Dr. Swafford was born in Alabama, starting school in Montgomery before moving to Texas with her father’s Air Force positions. She returned to Georgia for junior and senior high school where she was Valedictorian of Lakeview-Oglethorpe High School and National Merit Scholar, Presidential Scholar at West Georgia College graduating Magna cum Laude, and a graduate of the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta in 1981. She did her residency in Pediatrics at the Texas Health Science Center in Houston, staying for an additional three years to split the post of Chief Pediatric Resident in the first two years, and then to complete her Fellowship in Pediatric Nephrology in the third year in 1987.

Her first clinical position after completing her Fellowship was with Carbondale Clinic in Carbondale, IL. The shortage of physicians in rural Illinois was severe then, too. In the finest spirit of medicine, to serve the needs of the community, her tasks included providing coverage for adult nephrology when the clinic adult nephrologist was not available. After five years with Carbondale Clinic, she became a general pediatrician at Rural Health, Inc., a Federally Qualified Health Center in Anna, IL., for six years, serving as Medical Director for 3 years. In 1998 she started Swafford Pediatrics, a private practice that continues. She had a great willingness to serve the handicapped children of her region, and this became a substantial portion of her work. As we understand, doing this kind of work in a rural area is not well compensated. While working at Rural Health, she obtained a Certificate in Medical Management and became a Medical Director with Health Alliance Medical Plans.

In 2009 she became the medical director of the SIU Children’s Medical Resource Network, a grant funded agency providing abuse exams, case reviews and expert court testimony, as well as supervision of other professionals in the network. This work continues.

In addition to the work she has done on behalf of children in Illinois, she has done significant work on behalf of the physicians of this region through her major commitment to the work of the Southern Illinois Medical Association. She was president of the organization in 2005, and has gone on to serve in the important role of Executive Secretary and Treasurer since 2007, continuing to the present. She not only makes sure that things happen for this organization, but she has been the key planner and organizer for our annual meetings, including their educational component. She has served an administrative role during this time period for the Political Action Committee of the Statewide Medical Alliance to Save Healthcare, otherwise known as SMASH. We can't say enough how crucial her leadership and work has been in these organizations in their effort to serve the physician community of our part of the state. The success and continuation of these organizations has been in a large part due to her work.

She has been a preceptor for medical students, residents, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and has lectured medical students and residents at SIU in both Carbondale and Springfield, where she is an assistant professor of pediatrics. She does ten or more presentations a year now to different professional medical, judicial or law enforcement groups on the topic of child abuse. She did a presentation to this group on this subject at our annual SIMA meeting held at Anderson Hospital in Maryville in 2014.

She has served on multiple local, regional and statewide committees. We will list some, but the description of her involvement is not all-inclusive.

She has served or is currently serving on the Board of Directors of The Southern Seven Health Department, the Union County Coalition, The Marion Area Child Death Review Team, the Quality Improvement Committee with Health Alliance, and a variety of other positions with Union County Hospital where she remains on staff. She previously served on the Lead Advisory Committee for the Illinois Department of Public Health, and is currently on the State of Illinois Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board, the Immunization Advisory Committee of the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Medical Advisory Board of the Division of Specialized Care for Children. These important positions with the State of Illinois are unpaid. She was asked her how she ended up on so many State of Illinois committees, when it involved so much travel from Anna to Springfield, or Chicago. She said that usually someone from the State of Illinois recruited her because of her patient population and the geographic area of service of her practice. She told me that she was willing to do so because she has always wanted to do the things that she feels strongly about. She has done and continues to do this work out of concern to represent and care for the children's needs of our southern most counties.

Dr. Swafford continues to extend her self professionally. At a time in life when most of us are thinking about ways to avoid any more test examinations, she completed the board testing and became board certified by the American Board of Pediatrics in

Child Abuse in 2014. She is one of only around 324 physicians nationwide, and one of only three pediatricians outside of Chicago in Illinois with this credential. She is widely appreciated for this unique expertise that she brings to aid in the care of children, and is an invaluable resource in this field to her region. In 2015 she was honored by the Illinois Rural Health Association with the "Rural Physician of Excellence Award."

Dr. Swafford is an extremely talented, generous and hard working pediatrician who has committed her career to a life of caring in a rural community. She has worked to meet the professional needs for educating our future physicians and health care team. She has cared for her colleague physicians in her longstanding commitment to our professional organization. She has uniquely served the needs of the children in our southern most counties, without a peer in this part of the state. When we think about the type of physician we would like to bring to rural Illinois, we need to look no further than the example given us by Dr. Kathy Swafford.