

“The Family Physician: Providing Your Medical Home”

Theme: *Describe the impact of a Family Physician in your life or the life of your family and/or the role of the Family Physician in your community. In what ways do Family Physicians strengthen the various aspects of the community?*

Dr. Howard Clark practiced family medicine for over sixty-one years in Morton, Mississippi and is considered by many to be a living legend. Often referred to as a country doctor, he retired in 2017 at the age of ninety. He served as the family medical doctor at Clark Clinic, Chief of Staff at Scott Regional Hospital, and Medical Director at The Mississippi Care Center. Dr. Clark was my grandmother's primary physician when she was admitted to the nursing home after suffering many years from a complicated and debilitating illness. Not only did he provide her with quality medical care, but he also showed her respect and compassion. He was emotionally supportive and generous with his time as he answered our endless questions and calmly and patiently addressed our fears. Often whenever we visited my grandmother, we would see Dr. Clark studying her medical file searching for ways to improve her quality of life. My family will always be grateful for his kindness and his gentle guidance as he prepared us for my grandmother's impending death.

Dr. Clark was not only a beloved family physician, but he was a respected leader in the community. He dedicated his entire life to improving the lives of others. Dr. Clark was a member of the Scott County School Board for many years. As the physician for the high school football team, he donated his time and money to support the school's athletic programs. A member of the First Baptist Church, Dr. Clark served as a Sunday School teacher for many years. He is a military veteran, a member of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Lions Club, the Chamber of Commerce and many other service-oriented organizations.

Morton, a small town located in Scott County, Mississippi, has a population of less than four thousand, and the average income per family is less than \$26,000 a year. Before Dr. Clark opened the Clark Medical Clinic in 1956, there was not another practicing physician in town. Dr. Clark was instrumental in having the Scott Regional Hospital reopen in 1993 after it was closed in 1989, and he fought tenaciously to have it remain in Morton. When Dr. Clark saw there was a need for a nursing home, he opened the Mississippi Care Center in Morton in 1970. The facilities that he helped open have had an immense economic and social impact on the community.

Dr. Clark is a perfect example of the importance of family physicians and how they strengthen various aspects of a community. By practicing medicine in a small town that needed a family doctor, he not only provided quality health care, but he contributed to the community by providing employment and revenue from his clinic, the hospital and the nursing home that opened because of his influence. His influence and the economic and social impact of his practice will continue long after his retirement. Family doctors, like Dr. Clark, help to build stronger communities.