



Photo by Amy Lynn Schreck

Part of something bigger

**Frank Byrne**

By Amanda N. Wegner

Frank Byrne got into health care on something of a fluke. An engineering major at Notre Dame, he dropped out of an engineering materials class three weeks into his first semester and enrolled in a literature class instead. When he returned home that summer, his grandmother, “in her typical Irish brogue,” told him to come to the nursing home she worked at the next day.

“She said the last orderly didn’t work out, and ‘Show up and we’ll see if you’re any better,’” recalls Frank.

It was there, in that nursing home on Stanton Island, that Dr. Frank Byrne, president of St. Mary’s Hospital found health care — not engineering — was his calling.

“It was there I developed a passion for people who are vulnerable, have needs, require special attention,” says Frank. “I learned what a gift it is to help others and to be part of something bigger.”

### Welcome to Madison

A pulmonary and critical doctor, Frank entered health care administration in 1994 at Parkview Hospital in Fort Wayne, Ind. As his term as a medical officer came to an end that year, Frank was pulled aside by the hospital’s CEO, Dave Ridderheim.

“He said, ‘You seem to think you have ideas and can’t keep quiet about them. Why not help us create a health system that works and doesn’t take a pain-in-the-neck doctor like you to navigate the system,’” recalls Frank, noting he took it as a compliment.

Frank moved from patient care to administration, but after some time, his vision and values fell out of alignment with the hospital and his work there. After reviewing some opportunities, he and his wife, Cindy, decided it was time for a change and he would leave his job.

And then Cindy learned of Frank’s calling.

The couple was visiting with their local bishop for lunch, when he pulled Cindy aside and said, “You’re being called to do something. It’s out there. Just be patient, keep your mind and heart open. It’s out there.”

Six weeks later, a recruiter called Frank to tell him about an opening in Madison.

The Byrnes were no strangers to Madison or Wisconsin when they arrived one cold day in February 2004. They had visited when their youngest daughter, Lindsay, was accepted to UW-Madison (she ultimately went



1. Frank Byrne at the Rural Clinic in Mosoriot working for the Indiana University HIV/AIDS program in Kenya. 2. (Left to right) Frank Byrne, along with his wife Cindy, daughter Lindsay, son Michael and daughter Shannon near the state capitol in fall 2009. 3. Frankie & the Bananas, September 2009. 4. Frank Byrne practicing at the Indiana University HIV/AIDS program, Eldoret, Kenya in summer 2004. Submitted Photos.

to her parents’ alma mater); and their oldest daughter, Shannon, attended St. Norbert’s College in DePere.

The couple also has a son, Michael, who is a junior at Edgewood High School.

“Cindy always said if we ever left Indiana, we’d go to Wisconsin. She better not wish for anything else,” jokes Frank.

He arrived a day early to do some “mystery shopping” and was wowed by the experience. So much that he evokes the spirit of Jerry Maguire to describe the visit: “They had me at ‘hello.’ Very quickly, I went from thinking this was [an] interesting [opportunity] to ‘how do you think I’m part of this?’”

### In partnership

Partnership is an integral part of Frank’s life, personally and professionally.

“No story about me would be complete without talking about my wife,” he says.

Cindy and Frank met when they were 17 and 19, respectively, and married when Cindy turned 18. They have been married for 36 years.

“I like to say we grew up together and just happened to be married,” says Frank. “We really are a great partnership, and we each

play our best roles.”

That same idea extends to St. Mary’s.

“The work of St. Mary’s is a team,” says Frank. “What I do would be meaningless and unfulfilling if I didn’t have a great team and partners working beside me.”

Much of Frank’s daily work is done in tandem with others. From working with St. Mary’s regional clinics, St. Mary’s Foundation and Dean Health System board, to collaborating with the physicians of Dean Health System and residents from UW-Madison’s Department of Family Medicine.

“One of the greatest things in administration is thinking how many people came together to do exceptional work. No one does anything alone. We all have to be doing our personal best for the best possible outcome for everyone.”

Interacting with the community is also a vital part of Frank’s work, which is something he learned early on in his career.

“When I was a medical officer and on the hospital board back in Fort Wayne, I saw the bigger picture of how my work fit in within the hospital and the role of the hospital in the

Continued on next page



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## GET UP, GET OUT!

It's April, and winter's officially over ... get up and go!

"It is never too late to take care of yourself," says Frank, who's an avid bicyclist.

**Get fit:** "Do simple forms of exercise. You don't need expensive equipment. Walk for 30 minutes a day and you'll reap dramatic benefits." (As a reminder, if you haven't exercised in a while, be sure to check with your physician.)

**Keep your mind sharp:** "You work your muscles to keep them strong, same with your brain." Audit classes at the university, play games that challenge your mind, learn something new. "Do things that are a challenge."

**Stay involved:** "Social engagement is important, too. We know that the more people isolate themselves, the less healthy they tend to be."

**Be healthy:** Eat healthy, don't smoke (or quit smoking), visit your doctor regularly ... "all that stuff you already know you should do."

community," says Frank. "We're very involved in the community. Instead of waiting for people to find us on South Park Street, we go out and find people where they are."

And then, there's the task of finding balance.

"That's where it comes in handy to have been a critical care physician. What's the cliché, you make plans and God laughs? Positive or negative, you have to respond to it," says Frank. "In both my family and our leadership team, I have people who bring different perspectives and skills, and it all balances out."

Plus, throw in some family time at the Memorial Union or Arboretum, enjoying the arts, volunteering for the local Notre Dame club or rocking out on the keyboards (yes! Frank's a rocker!), it's all worth it.

"I am just one person who plays a role in something bigger, in my family, at the hospital. There are a lot of people more important than me."



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