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Esteemed cardiologist Brian Gross, MD, retires after 35 years

To his patients, Dr. Brian Gross is known as a beloved doctor with a bow tie and boundless energy. To the medical community, he's considered a leading voice in cardiology care, a clinical mentor, an ethical compass and one of the driving forces behind Asante's world-class cardiology program and the region's award-winning STEMI program.



So it is with mixed emotions that patients and colleagues are wishing Dr. Gross a well-deserved retirement from full-time practice at Southern Oregon Cardiology and Asante Rogue Regional. His last day was May 31.

"I feel fortunate to have had the chance to practice with him, but I've always dreaded when this day would come," said Kent Dauterman, MD, a fellow interventional cardiologist who joined Southern Oregon Cardiology in part because of Dr. Gross's enthusiasm about medicine. "He is one of those rare people who can solve problems while also making others feel good about themselves. His infectious positivity and gracious professionalism will be missed."

Dr. Gross, whose work days started before dawn and often ended after dark, was instrumental in developing one of the nation's first [STEMI](#) (ST-elevation myocardial infarction) programs in 2003. He and his colleagues brought together emergency service providers, hospital emergency departments and other groups to create what was then a novel approach to rapid heart attack response in outlying areas. Instead of being treated at their local emergency room and then transferred, patients suffering a heart attack would be brought directly to Asante Rogue Regional's cath lab, where the blocked artery could be opened and blood flow to the heart restored.

The first year the process was in place, ARRC's in-hospital mortality rate for STEMI patients dropped from an already low 8.6 percent to an astonishing 2.1 percent. The results were so impressive that Dr. Gross and other Asante cardiologists were encouraged to publish their findings in the [American Journal of Cardiology](#) in 2007. That was followed by an article in the [Journal of the American College of Cardiology](#) in 2009 that reported continued favorable outcomes, which were mirrored in other communities. The articles prompted a major shift in how STEMI was treated around the country.

Dr. Gross recently collaborated with Jackson County Emergency Medical Services on their rollout of [PulsePoint](#), a mobile app that alerts CPR-trained responders to intervene if someone nearby has a cardiac arrest.



Aside from his public roles, Dr. Gross is known for his personal approach to his work. He chose, for example, to meet arriving STEMI patients at the door rather than inside the cath lab. On case notes, he always added a personal detail about the patient beyond the usual clinical descriptions, such as "The patient is a part-time farmer, but full-time fly fisherman," said Jon Brower, MD, who also decided to join Southern Oregon Cardiology in 2006 in part because of Dr. Gross.

"When I came to town, Brian Gross picked me up from the airport," Dr. Brower recalls. "I walk to the baggage claim and instead of a prepaid driver there's a cardiologist standing there."

This personal touch also extended to Dr. Brower's wedding, which took place in Arizona in 2010. Dr. Gross not only insisted on attending, he stood up and gave a toast.

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Cardiac surgeon David Folsom, MD, said he was inspired by Dr. Gross's approach to patient care. "One of medicine's great blessings is our calling to treat all mankind with the highest ethical and professional care," he said. "Whether it is a senator or an addict, the mayor or a prisoner, liberal or conservative, each patient is treated as though they are special. No one I know did this better than Brian Gross."

Asante CEO Roy Vinyard recalls that Dr. Gross was one of the first physicians he met when he joined Asante in 1999. "He is an outstanding person in every aspect," Vinyard said. "He is a gifted cardiologist with an incredible work ethic and great personality. Beyond that, he is a true gentleman. His impact on improving the health of our community will be felt for years to come."

Dr. Gross isn't retiring completely; he plans to resume practicing medicine part-time at Southern Oregon Cardiology in October. But he wants to slow down and enjoy other parts of life that 80- to 100-hour work weeks didn't permit. (His fellow cardiologists calculated that over his career, Dr. Gross's call nights totaled 17.7 years.)

"I'm 68," he said, explaining his decision to slow down. "Most interventional cardiologists would have given up the torch five or six years earlier."

Between now and October, he's got a list of things to accomplish. He wants to sit down with the latest New England Journal of Medicine and actually read it cover to cover. He plans to take a week-long rafting trip along the Salmon River in Idaho, do more fishing and maybe take some classes.

He and his wife, Nancy, a former nurse, will travel to see their children. Their physician son Nate lives in San Francisco, where he co-founded the medical app Doximity. Daughter Emily is a physical therapist in Seattle. Their twins, Bay and Kelsey, live in New York and Boston, respectively. Like their older brother, both have careers in digital medical technology — Bay with Google Alphabet and Kelsey with a dermatologic start-up.



In the meantime, Dr. Gross is receiving some heartfelt goodbyes. The wife of one former patient posted her appreciation online: "In May of 2004 you saved the life of my husband," she wrote. "I will never forget the high-fives and handshakes from other doctors and nurses as you left his room to carry on with your day. You performed a miracle that day and we all knew it. You are a special hero to me!"

Clinic and hospital colleagues have planned private farewell events that are expected to draw hundreds of well-wishers.

"I came to town in 1982 and I didn't know a soul," Dr. Gross marvels. "Now there are literally thousands of people I know. I'm going to miss my partners and the nurses here at the clinic and the hospital. Those are relationships that will last forever."