

Dr. Stephen Adams

Distinguished UW Alumnus

Steve Adams, pharmacist and UW alumnus, has dedicated his life to serving others. And serve he has—through his work in pharmacy, research and the military, and his and his wife Pat’s philanthropy.

Adams served as part of Task Force Katrina, both as the chief pharmacist and commanding officer in the only operating clinic in St. Bernard Parish. He served on the United Nations peacekeeping force in Croatia, helping to establish a civilian hospital. He served in combat support hospitals during post-9/11 Operation Noble Eagle, during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

What skills did he bring to these jobs? In a word, pharmacy.

“It required management skill and organizing thinking,” Adams says. “It required logistics, it required security, patient care, supplies—all that stuff you to learn in pharmacy for a hospital setting.” He explains that you have to make sure your inventory is there when you need it, make sure both the drugs and personnel are secure, the logistics of where you’ll be tomorrow. “Everything that you learn to be a successful pharmacist and a manager.”

As a clinical pharmacist and the first fellow at the University of Texas MD Anderson Hospital and Cancer Institute in Houston, Adams has served by contributing to the development of drugs that doctors use every day—for example, drugs to treat cancer.

“Oncology—the treatment of cancer—is very complex,” Adams says. “You’re dealing with very dangerous drugs. They’re very chemically



Stephen and Patricia Adams
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unstable.” Many drugs act by making chemical bonds, and you have to make sure you bind in the right place and the right way. They also may not work well with living tissue, or multiple chemotherapy drugs may interact with each other in unpredictable ways. How do you balance all that?

One such drug treats ovarian cancer. Because this type of cancer grows in the abdomen, tumors can become fairly large before they are detected, and they throw out “runners” (peritoneal studs) that attach themselves to the diaphragm and the sides of the pelvis. The main tumor can be taken out with surgery, but the patient is left with small spots of tumor from the runners.

He worked on a compound (Cisplatin) that could be painted on these areas that would stop the growth of the cells. It also relieved the physical symptoms of cancer. However, unfortunately, it only penetrated six cells deep and does not cure the cancer.

Adams has worked on artificial saliva—similar in feel to liquid

jello—that relieves the discomfort of dental oncology patients whose saliva glands quit working due to radiation treatment. He further developed that compound by adding and altering a drug that treats ulcers (Sucralfate) to provide relief from cancer patients’ mouth sores, or stomatitis.

He and his wife, Pat, have served future generations through their philanthropy. They established the Dr. Stephen and Patricia Adams School of Pharmacy Student Service and Leadership Fund, which provides scholarships for pharmacy students and encourages service and leadership. They’re also remembering UW in their estate plans.

“I want these students to see where they can find a way to serve and to give back,” Adams says. “They need to become leaders, and they need to be able to translate that leadership into service. Not just, ‘OK, I took care of my patient today.’ The idea is to be a leader and somehow take your leadership and turn it into service.”

UW was important in preparing him for his service: “The class sizes were small, the instructors were superb, and help was always available. It was almost like a small family setting—or a large family setting. The University of Wyoming provided that strong foundation from which my career has been built.”

He adds, “I feel like giving to UW is one way to give back. What I did with the Army was giving back. What I did at Katrina was giving back—giving back to the community, to the country and obviously what we give back to each other. We’ve got to help each other.”