

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Physicians Find Outlets on the Air

After Dr. Thomas C. Shives underwent cervical disk surgery 18 years ago, he could not work for 3 months and was going stir crazy.

So he stopped by KROC-AM 1340, a news and talk radio station in Rochester, Minn., to ask if he could deliver the afternoon news.

"I did a lot of speech and debate when I was in high school, but I'd never done any radio stuff," Dr. Shives, professor of orthopedic surgery at the Mayo Medical School, Rochester, said.

Despite his lack of experience, Dr. Shives did so well in the audition that the station managers allowed him to give the afternoon news under an assumed name for 2 months during his recovery.

A few years later, the Zumbro Valley Medical Society asked Dr. Shives what it would take to launch a call-in radio show to serve listeners in the Olmstead County, Minn., area. Dr. Shives approached KROC-AM with the idea of a call-in show that would address a different medical topic each week, and on June 1, 1991, the first segment of "Healthline" hit the airwaves.

Hosted by Dr. Shives, "Healthline" airs every Saturday morning from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. During the first few minutes of the show, a medical news report is given, followed by a 10- to 15-minute interview with a physician who is an expert on the chosen topic for that broadcast. For the last 30 minutes, the invited guest fields questions from listeners.

Topics run the gamut from stress management to incontinence to Alzheimer's disease.

"I wouldn't necessarily call it formal, but it's not necessarily entertainment," Dr. Shives said of the format. "The best thing about radio is that it's free. People can listen to it no matter what they're doing. A lot of people listen to it in their cars, because we have quite a few people who call in on their cell phones, which wasn't true when I started [hosting this show]."

KROC-AM's program director Brent Ackerman said that "Healthline" is the No. 1-rated Saturday morning program in Rochester, with an estimated 3,000 people tuning in each week.

"With the Mayo Clinic literally in our backyard, we are fortunate to have access to some of the top physicians and specialists in the world," Mr. Ackerman said. "Tom is able to invite these guests into our studios and have them talk about their specialties plus answer questions from our listeners. He's also excellent at keeping things in layman's terms, so that it doesn't get too technical for our audience."

Dr. Shives estimates that it takes him 3-4 hours a week to prepare for each show. "I prepare an outline for the guests, so they'll know what topics we're going to discuss," he said. "Then I prepare the news, which I get off the Internet and edit for radio."

Since the program's inception, Dr. Shives has never been paid for his work on "Healthline"; it's a volunteer post. "The reason that I do it is because a lot of people listen, and I think it's good public relations for the medical profession," he said. "One of the chief complaints is, 'my doctor doesn't talk to me.' This gives them a chance to listen to a doctor and to call in and ask questions. The most satisfying thing is that when we announce at the bottom of the hour that we're going to be taking phone calls, all the lines light up right away."

Another highlight for him is the interest most guests take when they are invited on the show. "Almost whoever I ask to be on the program always says yes," he said. "There are very few who are unable or unwilling to take the time to spend an hour on the radio Saturday morning."

Despite the live call-in format, Dr. Shives and his guests have received few prank calls over the years. Some calls can be colorful, though. He remembers one call he and a heart specialist fielded from a female listener. "She said she just wanted us to know that when she had a problem, she saw Dr. So-and-So. The next woman called in and said



Dr. Thomas C. Shives (center) hosts "Healthline," the No. 1-rated Saturday morning program in Rochester.

that she wouldn't take her dog to see Dr. So-and-So."

For the one or two times per month Dr. Shives is unable to host "Healthline," Dr. H. Clark Hoagland assumes the duty. An internist who retired from the Mayo Clinic 3 years ago, Dr. Hoagland also had no formal broadcast training.

"I've had people come up to me, some who know me, some who do not, and say, 'Boy, you have a good radio voice,'" Dr. Hoagland said. "I have no clue what they mean by that."

Known as "Doc Hoagland" to his listeners, he enjoys the informal, conversational style of the show. "If my guest uses a word or phrase that I don't think the listening audience would understand, then I will interject a question: What do you mean by that particular fact? It's truly a conversation between me and my guest about a particular topic."

He also likes the fact that the show reaches people who may not have any other means of keeping up to date on health news. "In this area of Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin, we are a farming district," Dr. Hoagland explained. "We have a tremendous number of farms for beans, corn, hogs, and cows."

He explained that the farmers in the area "many times either don't want to look at television or don't have television. Some of them have no knowledge about computers. It gives us a way of getting to them."

His fulfillment comes at the end of program. He'll walk out of the studios with the guest for that segment and think, "I have done something for the community as a volunteer and, hopefully, they've learned something from what we did," he said.

Dr. Shives would like to see "Healthline" become syndicated someday. "That's difficult to do because of the time slot," he said. "But that's one thing I'd like to see, because I think it would be good for the general public outside of southeastern Minnesota."

An 'Amateur Folklorist' Goes Live

Dr. John Uhlemann has been hosting a radio show for more than 13 years, but it has nothing to do with medicine. Every Saturday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. he hosts a show called "Music From the Hills" on KDHX 88.1 FM in St. Louis, a listener-supported station that provides a wide range of musical and cultural-affairs programming.

As a student at Grinnell College, Iowa, he joined a folk-dance group, which at the time in the 1960s "was considered an avant garde thing to do," said Dr. Uhlemann, a dermatologist who practices in St. Charles, Mo., and at Washington University, St. Louis. "We did mostly line dances from the Balkan countries. In those countries, the music aims toward the ecstatic. In other words, you don't listen to pretty melodies and go skipping around in circles. Instead, it was a much more vigorous type of music and dancing."

Dr. Uhlemann said that the music was unlike anything



"Music From the Hills," hosted by Dr. John Uhlemann, features tunes from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

he had heard before, and he began to collect recordings for his own enjoyment. But after befriending some of the staff at KDHX, he was invited to host a show to spotlight folk and traditional music primarily from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

"I am not an amateur broadcaster; I am an amateur folklorist with a radio show," Dr. Uhlemann said. "Like the late [classical music radio personality] Seymour DeKoven, I try not to be stuffy, pedantic, or dull, if I can help it, but I leave it to my listeners to decide. The music I play is ethnic music that lets the local people speak for themselves. That is, I do not play 'world music' in the sense of soft rock in a language you don't speak. This is real folk and national music, designed for consumption by the people the musicians grew up with. Too much 'world music' is watered down for the international market. It's like putting bean sprouts in beef stroganoff and calling it Thai cooking. You might like the taste, but it isn't Thai cooking."

It takes him up to 4 hours each week to prepare for his show, including making CDs from hundreds of LPs at home. He considers it his job as host of "Music From the Hills" to "introduce people to the music in such a way that it's palatable and get them to listen to things they would never otherwise listen to," he said. "There's something of a teaching component to that, and I like teaching. But there's also this component of 'what can I do with this material that will be not just informative but also an aesthetic experience for people?' That's the creative side of it."

Dr. Uhlemann has visited every Eastern European country except Russia and the Baltic states, so when he plays a song from a certain country or region, he may share an anecdote based on his own experience there. "Sometimes I'll give them a story, like 'this comes from such-and-such village. This village is interesting because. . .'"

He said that hosting provides a nice contrast to the "by-the-book" nature of his dermatology practice. "Since I don't do a lot of the cosmetic things that I guess might fulfill such a role, this for me is a more creative thing," he said.

The most fulfilling part of the show is when a listener calls in and says something like, "I have no idea what you just played, but that was the most incredible stuff I've ever heard in my life. Explain this to me a little more," he said.

One day, a listener called in to pledge \$300 to the station "because he loved what I was doing," Dr. Uhlemann said. He had never pledged to the station before but he "wanted us to know how much this had changed his life, to hear this kind of music. It's just as wonderful as when a patient says, 'You know? Nobody ever explained my disease to me the way you just did.' I think that's great." ■

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau