

# Kansas City's Medical Marvels

FOR TWO DECADES, INGRAM'S TOP DOCTORS HAVE DEFINED EXCELLENCE IN HEALTH CARE

By Dennis Boone



Sometimes, it's worth looking back to see how far you've come.

So it is with this, the 19<sup>th</sup> annual installment of Ingram's Top Doctors. We introduced these awards in 1999 to recognize the exceptional levels of care provided by a physician corps serving a metropolitan area that has grown to nearly 3 million people.

Extrapolated from national figures, this region quite likely boasts more than 9,000 doctors of various kinds, from primary-care physicians and family-medicine practitioners to the most sophisticated medical specialists in cancer care, stroke and diabetes treatment, cardiovascular disease and other fields.

So as we stop to take a look back, consider this: If only the top 5 percent of that universe could qualify as Top Doctors—those whose levels of competency, care and compassion set standards for their organizations—one might expect nearly 500 physicians to have attained this status in 19 years.

But Top Doctors is considerably more exclusive than that: Fewer than half that number, in fact, have been recognized over the years. So membership in this club truly isn't just out of the ordinary, it can be out of the *extraordinary*.

We started this program with one overarching criterion for membership: If it were you in need of treatment, or a member of your family, to whom would you turn for the highest level of care?

For two decades, the physician community and hospital administrators have answered that question with resounding endorsements of those who have been recognized as *Ingram's* Top Doctors. Their judgment, and the skills of the physicians honored, are tools that all of us can employ to improve the quality of life—and lives—in this region.



Young **Stephanie Graff** had an idol in health care, a sister 16 years her senior who was a nurse. “Every time I would say, ‘I want to be a nurse,’ she would say, ‘Stephanie, you can be a doctor,’” Graff remembers. “I guess it stuck. Having someone believe you can be the biggest version of your dream is powerful.”

So is a mentoring influence like the high school teacher who had advised her on the importance of enthusiastic reading and its impact on career choices. “The science, pharmacology, and biology of cancer rivets me,” Graff says. “I love reading about my job. Breast oncology in particular has a very strong human element that I find to be the best part. I get to connect with my patients personally. It is absolutely the perfect fit for me.”

But it’s one that requires, well, lots of additional reading, given the pace of change. “Oncology is advancing at a remarkable pace,” she says. “New technology advances like Da Vinci robotic surgery, TruBeam radiation oncology, and diagnostic advances like genetic and genomic profiling have all improved patient care.” Drug development, too, is ever-evolving, she says, and in her work at the cancer institute, she’s been part of research efforts to bring new oncology drugs brought to market.

Working with patients, assisting in their recovery, engaging in research—all of it has its rewards. “I feel lucky to have validating moments nearly every day,” Graff says. “Hugs from survivors fill my day as we celebrate life beyond breast cancer. Some of the most meaningful moments in my life have been goodbyes with patients at end of life when I try to communicate exactly what that person has meant to me.”

And a few patients, she says, truly stand out, because they “taught me personal strength, the power of love, and overcoming adversity through positivity and humor. How can I be frustrated with minor setbacks or problems when spending my time with persons as resilient as my cancer patients?

“I am lucky to have been a part of their life.”