



Biomedical Pioneer Makes Legacy Gift

Aspiring to Change Global Health

When James “Jim” Turley, Ph.D., answered his phone 17 years ago, a transformational chapter in his life opened.

A nurse by training, Dr. Turley was teaching at The University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth) School of Nursing when Doris Ross, Ph.D., invited him to participate in founding a new school at UTHealth that would be focused on informatics—harnessing data to improve patient safety and quality of care. Dr. Turley, who conducted post-doctoral work in informatics and had a keen interest in the field, couldn’t say no.

“I believed that the field was critical to the future of health care,” he said. “All of health care needs informatics in order to be more functional, efficient, and cost-effective.”

Dr. Turley proved instrumental in developing what would become known as the UTHealth School of Biomedical Informatics (SBMI). He taught as an associate professor for 14 years, researching the visual display of clinical data and its effect on clinical decision-making.



Drs. Jim Turley and Lillian Eriksen decided years ago that if they had any remaining resources, they wanted them to be useful to other people.

“Our goal was always to encourage international students to take what they learned here, return home, and transform health care in their countries.”

“As a founding faculty member of SBMI, Dr. Turley was pivotal to helping improve the efficacy of health care through biomedical informatics,” said Jiajie Zhang, Ph.D., SBMI dean and Dr. Doris L. Ross Professor.

Meanwhile, Dr. Turley’s wife, Lillian Eriksen, D.S.N., M.N., served with distinction on the School of Nursing’s faculty, teaching and researching for many years as a tenured associate professor. Nursing was a passion she shared with Jim, who felt he never truly left the profession behind when he began teaching informatics.

“Nursing is really the focal point for making health care more efficient,” he said. “Nurses are often responsible for the movement of medical information within the system, so they’re in a position to drive efficacy.”

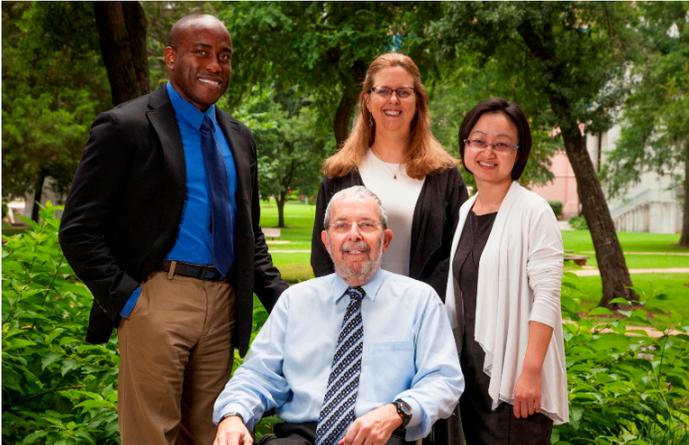
Many of the students Drs. Turley and Eriksen taught came from countries where nursing and informatics were not as advanced. The couple took a special interest in international students, seeing in them the potential for a global health care revolution.

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As they planned for the future, Drs. Turley and Eriksen wanted to make a lasting difference in the lives of students, even after their teaching days ended.

“My wife and I had decided long ago that if we had any remaining resources, we wanted them to be useful to other people,” Dr. Turley said.

After Dr. Eriksen passed away in 2012, Dr. Turley decided to act on their intentions. In an extraordinary commitment, he pledged to establish two \$1 million scholarship funds at the university through his estate plan. One will create the *James Turley Memorial Endowed Scholarship for Global Health* at SBMI, while the other will found the *Lillian Eriksen Memorial Endowed Scholarship for Global Health* at the School of Nursing.



Back row, clockwise from left: School of Biomedical Informatics PhD candidates Rafeek Yusuf and Claire Loe. UTHealth School of Nursing RN-BSN student Li Peng.
In front: Jim Turley, PhD

Endowed scholarships like Dr. Turley's further the university's efforts to facilitate the exchange of knowledge worldwide.

"At the heart of UTHealth's mission is sharing our knowledge and learning from the experience of others in order to shape a healthier future for all," Dr. Butler said. "Dr. Turley's gift will allow us to extend our reach to underserved populations internationally by further encouraging students to engage in global health efforts."

Dr. Turley, who retired from SBMI in 2012, now serves as an adjunct professor. He says the school has grown and changed immensely in a very short time.

"I think they're just doing some dynamite stuff," he said. "They're doing things that I would have loved to do years ago when I was starting out."

Although he has left his full-time career, there are no rocking chairs in Dr. Turley's future; he plans to take his love of scuba diving around the world, where he'll visit some of the international students he taught and learn first-hand how they're making a difference.

"My vision has always been for international students to become leaders in their own countries," he said, "and that's what I'm hoping will happen."

"Having known Lillian since we were doctoral students, I know this gift is the epitome of what she stood for and devoted her life to," said Patricia L. Starck, Ph.D., R.N., School of Nursing Dean, John P. McGovern Distinguished Professor and Huffington Foundation Chair in Nursing Education Leadership.

"We are so grateful to Dr. Turley for his visionary philanthropy and longtime dedication to the school," added Dr. Zhang.

Both scholarships will support students in good academic standing, with a preference for students planning to practice outside the United States.

Bruce D. Butler, Ph.D., who oversees UTHealth's Office of Global Health Initiatives, says endowed scholarships like Dr. Turley's further the university's efforts to facilitate the exchange of knowledge worldwide.