



## Her favorite patients



# Dr. Tabitha Thrasher

## Wyoming's first UW-produced geriatrician practices in Casper

BY GAYLE M. IRWIN

The University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program in Casper recently welcomed the state's first University of Wyoming-produced geriatrician.

Tabitha Thrasher, DO, didn't set out to become a doctor for older patients, even though she had worked in nursing homes while attending high school in Missouri.

"I loved that population," she said. "My favorite person was my maternal grandma. She lived on a farm about 10 miles from the town we lived in, and we were very close. She was this quiet, stoic person."

Dr. Thrasher said she learned patience and a willingness to listen to others from her grandmother. Those traits can be easily applied to elder care.

"They need someone to listen to them," Dr. Thrasher said.

### Nontraditional student

Before pursuing medicine, Dr. Thrasher studied tourism management at the University of Central Missouri. She made that choice because, coming from a family of six, she didn't think she could get into medical school.

"I wanted to work in a big hotel and do event planning," she said. "I graduated and got married right before 9/11, so tourism slowed down a bit. I had to re-think my direction."

That new route became medicine, particularly after her father passed away.

"I'm not sure it correlated directly because of his death, but it just kept coming back to me ... it was more of a calling," she said. "My father passed away in 2003, and I didn't understand medically what was happening, which frustrated me, so this piqued my interest in medicine. I knew I wanted to do something that would allow me to interact with people and to help them."

She and her husband, Nate, lived in Colorado Springs at the time. She worked for a defense company and began taking pre-med at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs.

"It was just my husband and I in Colorado at the time. I worked full-time and took classes on the side," she said. "He worked as well. I made it through pre-med that way."

She attended classes in person.

"I had a very nice boss that would allow me to make up time if I needed to for labs or other things," she recalled. "A lot of [classes] were after hours or during lunch breaks. I took one or two classes a semester, so it took a while."

Prior to medical school, Dr. Thrasher traveled to Guatemala for a medical mission. That solidified her decision.

"I decided to fully pursue becoming a physician," she said.

She attended medical school at Rocky Vista University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Parker, Colorado. She went to school during the week and returned to Colorado Springs to spend the weekends with her husband.

She moved to Casper in 2012 for her residency at the University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program. Her husband stayed in Colorado.

"By the end of the first year, we realized we didn't like living apart, so he came up here," Dr. Thrasher said.

### Residency and focus

During a rotation in northeastern Wyoming, she worked with Newcastle physician Mike Jording, MD, spending a month learning more about family medicine in rural areas.

"She was well-accepted by our patients and staff," Dr. Jording recalled. "Things can get busy here, but she took care of the patients and handled them with great skill."

He said she took time to listen to the patients, especially the elderly.

"She listened to the life experiences of the patients, and she was respected," he said. "I think her move into the specialty [of geriatric medicine] was an easy step for her to make."

Dr. Thrasher thought highly of her experience there as well.

"Dr. Jording and his staff were amazing with education, and they were all very kind, open, and generous with their time," she said.



Dr. Tabitha Thrasher works at University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program in Casper.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. TABITHA THRASHER

Her last year of residency she spent more time caring for senior citizens.

"While I was in residency, I did a geriatric track my last year because I knew I wanted to focus on that," she said. "My whole time in medical school, I knew family medicine with an emphasis on geriatrics—I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do with that."

She discovered an avenue after her time in Wyoming.

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### Applying her skills and passion

After completing her residency, Dr. Thrasher and her family moved to Oregon where she worked at an outpatient clinic for a retirement community. She spent more than two years caring for the elderly. She maintained contact with Cindy Works, MD, at the University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program in Casper from whom she learned about the Geriatric Fellowship Program at the University of Wyoming. She applied and was accepted into the program, so she and her family returned to Wyoming.

"I did the fellowship part-time while also working as faculty at the [Casper] residency," Dr. Thrasher said. "I was the first fellow in the geriatric program."

She graduated last fall, becoming the first University of Wyoming-produced geriatrician. She serves at the University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program in Casper in several capacities.

As a geriatrician, she primarily works with patients 65 and older, assisting them with various issues such as falls, memory changes and medication management.

"We try to help with activities of daily living," she said of doctors in her field. "We're trying to change our focus to what quality we can give people, keeping them functional and as independent as possible. Working on goals with them is something I really enjoy."

She also takes rotations at Wyoming Medical Center and





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visits nursing homes, although “a pause” was put on that during the COVID crisis. She began making such visits again in early 2021.

Dr. Thrasher also serves on the board of Wyoming Dementia Care in Natrona County, and became program director of the University of Wyoming’s Geriatric Fellowship Program in January this year.

Additionally, Dr. Thrasher works as a sports medicine faculty member and assists residents of the University of Wyoming Family Medicine Residency Program in various ways.

She finds her career satisfying.

“What continues to motivate me to be a doctor is the connection I get to have with my patients, to celebrate their joys, to grieve their losses; it is a true honor to be allowed to care for them,” she said.

“I also enjoy the educational piece with the residents—they sometimes can get me to conduct lectures,” she added with a chuckle.

### Family time

When not actively engaged in the community of medicine or the community at large, Dr. Thrasher, her husband Nate and their 6-year-old daughter Edith enjoy traveling, hiking and camping.

“I love the openness of Wyoming—I enjoy being able to get away in 10 minutes!” she said. “I also love experiencing new cultures.”

In addition to her medical mission trip to Guatemala, Dr. Thrasher has visited Scotland, Africa, Venezuela and many other places. However, when time came to set down roots, she and her family chose Wyoming.

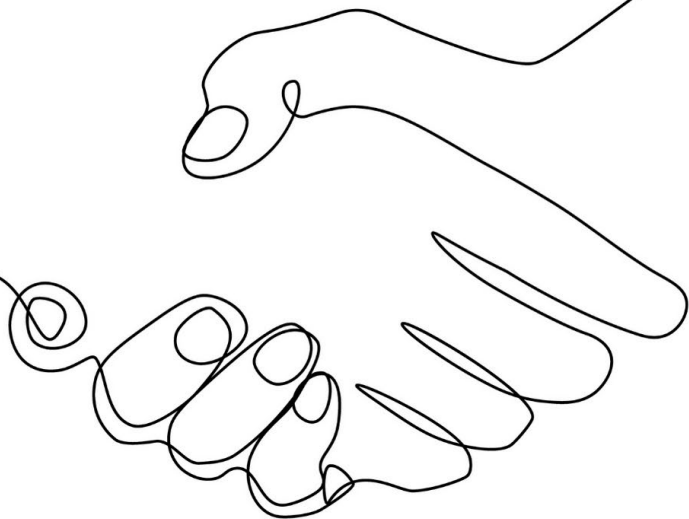
“It was the people who drew us back,” she said.

She said she and her family plan to remain in the state for some time.

“I’m always looking for ways to engage the community more in geriatric care and to help out the community,” she said. “For the time being, I’m pretty well settled here at the University of Wyoming, and I don’t have plans to leave Wyoming any time soon.”



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