

## **Our Boards in Action: Rick Barr**

### **Interviewed by Joelle Seligson**

How can children protect their skin from the sun, keep their hearts healthy, and lower their risk of diabetes? Kids learn how to take on all kinds of health challenges at Question It? Discover It!, a Saturday series held at the Mississippi Children's Museum in Jackson. Healthcare professionals ranging from surgeons to dermatologists engage families with fun and educational activities—such as playing Blood Sugar Bingo and creating ultraviolet light-activated bracelets as a reminder to reapply sunscreen—while also raising kids' interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers. The series is the brainchild of Rick Barr, chair of pediatrics at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and a board member at the museum. Mississippi's children face many challenges, including the highest rates of obesity and poverty in the United States. Barr shares how he has helped to bring the hospital and the museum together to help improve children's health.

#### **Dr. Barr, how did you come to work with the museum?**

Well, the children's museum is a great organization that has many of the same goals and objectives and, really, mission that the children's hospital has, to improve health and literacy of children in Mississippi. I was asked to serve on the board when the children's museum contacted our senior leadership and our chancellor, and we thought that there'd be great synergy between the organizations. I've really enjoyed serving on the board for the past several years.

#### **I know you've implemented a regular program at the museum. Could you tell me a little bit about Question It? Discover It!? I'm interested in how it was created and what the mission is behind it.**

Yeah, it's a great program where our physicians and other healthcare providers will spend part of a Saturday over at the museum interacting with children. The whole goal is to enhance the children's interest in science, technology, engineering, and math, the STEM fields. We really focus primarily on the healthcare/science fields. We cover everything from orthopedics, broken bones, to how the heart works, to the digestive system, and everything in between. And really try to interest children in future careers in science and healthcare.

#### **So, what kind of questions do you hear from children during these programs? Do you have any anecdotes or favorites?**

We've had a number of children that, based on their own healthcare experiences—many of them have been in the hospital or have been ill in the past and that has shaped—they will tell you exactly what kind of physician they want to be, down to very specific specialties. And it really is heartening to hear that. They turn the personal healthcare experiences into motivation to consider being a doctor or nurse or other healthcare provider in the future. The kids are just really energetic and want to learn. We even cover things like oral hygiene—anything that's hands-on or technology-based, they're all over.

**What do you think overall is their greatest takeaway?**

Greatest takeaway—they always learn something new. I think they get energized about science and healthcare, and we often see them back. I think the Saturdays that we're hosting this, we'll see the same kids back frequently. Obviously they're getting some positive reinforcement and benefit out of it.

**Why do you think it's important that Mississippi children have an opportunity like Question It? Discover It!?**

I think it's really important. Mississippi—there are lots of challenges throughout the state, healthcare being one of them. You know, our mission at the children's hospital at the University of Mississippi Medical Center is to improve health, not necessarily healthcare, but improve health of the children in Mississippi. So, programs like this are incredibly important to help us achieve that mission.

**What other ways are you working with the children's museum to address these kinds of needs and to give children a better future?**

Well, as I mentioned earlier, besides just health, the children's museum really focuses on literacy as well. And part of literacy and appropriate learning depends on appropriate child development, and making sure that we're screening for learning disabilities that kids might have. One of our biggest components of Question It? Discover It!—we have several sessions throughout the year that are focusing on learning, child development, normal behavior development. It's our—I think both parents and kids learn how they can, if a child is having challenges, where to go to have them addressed.

**Those were the majority of my questions. Is there anything I didn't touch on that you'd like to add?**

Well, just I'll comment that the children's museum is a fabulous organization. It's not necessarily just a museum. It's a fun place for kids to go. They learn to play

and have fun but really it's very educational; it's very focused on literacy, and I've had a tremendous experience being part of the board.

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