

# Teresa Morrell: living life to its fullest

Anyone who thinks small town living is synonymous with a slow pace should follow Teresa Morrell around for a day.

Morrell, as an M3, spent the winter in Murphysboro, Ill., fulfilling her Rural Medicine Education (RMED) preceptorship requirement. It came just months before her graduation from the College of Medicine and her completion of the master's in public health program. But busy and hectic appeared to fit Morrell just fine.

She began her office hours around 9 a.m. each day, under the guidance

of Dr. Matthew Hunsaker, who graduated from the College of Medicine in 1995.

"There are usually 10 to 15 patients in the morning, ranging from routine rechecks for chronic medical problems to patients with acute illnesses who called to get last minute appointments," Morrell said as she described a typical day. "I usually see patients by myself first. I take the history and do a physical exam. I then step out and tell Dr. Hunsaker about the patient and we discuss the care plan. We go back

into the exam room and talk to the patient together."

Morrell and Hunsaker then used their lunch hour to run over to the hospital to complete the day's rounds on admitted patients. They were back to the office by about 1 p.m. and saw patients until at least 5 p.m.



***Teresa Morrell (left) reported that she learned a tremendous amount about rural patient care from Matthew Hunsaker, MD, who graduated from the College of Medicine in 1995 (right). He completed his family practice residency at St. Mary's in Evansville, Ind., and has been practicing at the Murphysboro Health Center in Murphysboro, Ill., for the past four years.***



Morrell's time spent with Dr. Hunsaker was only the beginning.

"My evenings are usually filled with busy work," she said. "I am enrolled in an online class for the MPH degree, so there are always assignments or essays to work on for that. Some afternoons I drive over to the Adolescent Health Center in Carbondale, where I am working on a grant proposal with their health educator. We are researching the cardiovascular health of the adolescent population in southern Illinois."



*Teresa Morrell, MD, was recently recommissioned to the rank of Captain in the Air National Guard.*

Morrell also used the evening hours to update her online patient log, which is a requirement of the RMED program. Her fourth-year neurology requirement also prompted her to spend many hours working on neurology cases.

Although Morrell's accomplishments may already seem remarkable, there's more.

At the age of 19, Morrell enlisted in the Air National Guard. She had already completed one year of undergraduate work at Southern Illinois University when she decided it was time to join the service.

"It's something that's always been important to me," she said. "It teaches what this country is about. I think it's important to serve my country."

Those beliefs found Morrell serving one year of active duty before returning to her biology studies at SIU. Since then she has remained in the National Guard and reports for

duty one weekend each month and two consecutive weeks each year. Having achieved the status of staff sergeant, her job was that of a flight medic, treating people medically, driving an ambulance, giving vaccinations and working as an emergency medical technician.

In August of 2002, Morrell successfully completed the testing and application process necessary to move into officer status. She is now a second lieutenant and upon graduation from the College of Medicine, she will be promoted to the rank of captain and work as a flight surgeon.

Morrell said that although the tuition reimbursement she receives from the National Guard is appreciated,

it is hardly her driving force for remaining in the service.

"I've had a lot of opportunities I would not otherwise have had," she said. She marks "making it through boot camp" as a bigger accomplishment than earning her bachelor's degree. And she remembers her mission trip to Guyana in 1998 as one of the most cherished experiences of her life.

She and a group of nurses and medics, two dentists and one doctor were dropped off at a makeshift hospital and treated people for malaria, poisonous snakebites and variety of other ailments – "all with chickens running around at our feet."

"You really see what medicine is," Morrell said. "At a place like that it's totally different. I'd love to go on another mission trip."

But that may have to wait as Morrell works hard to prepare for her upcoming internal medicine/pediatrics residency at Indiana University in Indianapolis. In the past few months, she completed her preceptorship, medical school, her master's of public health degree—and even found time to marry classmate Ryan Riech. Morrell's new husband is also an RMED and MPH graduate.

As she looks forward to the next step in her busy life, Morrell reflects on where credit is due.

"The Guard has forced me to become a terrific time manager and a disciplined person," she said. "And

getting through medical school and the MPH would have been more difficult if Ryan and I didn't do it together.

I've learned quite a bit."

