



DR. CHEN

music and timing is important in medicine," said conductor Dr. Wahby, director of special projects for the Veterans Health Administration in Washington, D.C.

Doctors get musical start

DR. WAHBY TRACES THE GROUP'S origin to the late 1970s, when he practiced at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. "A few physicians got together and said, 'Let's do some Christmas caroling for the patients,'" he said. More than 70 turned out, so they gave a concert instead and started a medical musical group.

Dr. Wahby started a similar group when he moved to Connecticut. He formed the VA-National Medical Musical Group around 1990 after relocating to Washington, D.C. In the early days, only doctors participated. "Now, we say if you have seen a doctor, you can come and play with us," Dr. Wahby joked.

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<http://medicalmusical.com/>
VA-National Medical Musical Group

Richard Chen, MD, a Los Angeles anesthesiologist, has played with the group for about 10 years. He started playing violin at age 6 and now is the concertmaster. He loves performing and enjoys making new friends.

"The friendship in the group is tremendous. It's like another [medical] society I joined," he said.

The musicians usually gather from around the country a day or two before the concert and rehearse. Before that, they practice on their own. The doctors pay for their own room and board.

Most of the group members have played in local bands and orchestras. Joseph Car, MD, for example, plays with the Bloomington Concert Band in Indiana and the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. Like most in the group, he takes time off from his medical practice to perform with the VA group and fine-tunes his musicianship when he can.

"You have to have a significant level of playing experience. It's definitely not for beginners," said Dr. Car, an internist in Spencer, Ind.

Doctors such as Wayne McBride, DO, say they enjoy performing for veterans. Meeting celebrities is also fun, even if some don't stick around long. At one concert, the musicians didn't see Andy Williams until about five minutes before he went onstage.

"Andy kind of blew in and blew out. But it went well," said Dr. McBride, a U.S. Navy captain.

Dr. Wahby said the group's concerts are meant to offer more than entertainment. "It's an instrument of healing," he said. "Instead of a stethoscope or scalpel or medicine, we use music." ♦