



# BEST <sup>2008</sup> DOCTORS

## **I** T'S A COMMON GOAL:

Find the best doctor for your health care needs. We're fortunate in San Antonio to have so many great choices, whether they're affiliated with the nationally recognized University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Baptist Health System, CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health Care or some other institution.

To help you to choose a physician who's right for you, we turned to the experts — Best Doctors, Inc. — which has been compiling a list of top docs for more than a dozen years.

Best Doctors compiles its annual list by surveying more than 35,000 physicians nationally and asking the following question: "If you or a loved one needed a doctor in your specialty, and you could not treat them yourself, to whom would you refer them?"

Each doctor surveyed has the opportunity to comment confidentially on other physicians listed in his or her specialty, and to make additional nominations. All

doctors in the Best Doctors database are checked for licensing and certification requirements and for any disqualifying disciplinary actions. The result is a voting and nominee pool that is constantly sifted, refined and improved — whose very broadness and depth help reduce biases and cronyism.

Finally, Best Doctors, Inc. is independent. Doctors are not asked for and are not allowed to pay any fees for inclusion as a Best Doctor.

No list could ever include every outstanding area physician, and we're certain that some of you may have favorite docs who are not mentioned here. Nonetheless, we believe you'll find what follows to be interesting reading, and an invaluable reference for you and your family. ▶

STORIES BY JENNIE BADGER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISSA HOLLIMON



## FIGHT FOR LIFE

Ruth Elizabeth Berggren wages battle against infectious diseases.

Dr. Ruth Berggren had lived in New Orleans a week before the tragedy of 9/11 made headlines. Almost exactly four years later, she endured the ravages of Hurricane Katrina as a teaching physician for the infectious diseases unit of Charity Hospital.

The oldest continually operating hospital in the country, Charity Hospital is four blocks from the Superdome and Berggren's unit was situated on the ninth floor. There, Berggren — who chose not to evacuate because she was on call when the hurricane struck — endured six days of declining conditions: Stifling heat, fatigue, sniper fire, no electricity, no clean water and inadequate bathroom facilities.

Through it all, she and her colleagues managed to keep all 18 patients in the unit alive and learned first-hand the frailties of human nature under the most chaotic and dehumanizing of conditions.

Such dramatic circumstances are not what most physicians likely envision when they decide to enter the field. Although Berggren certainly could not have predicted that her stay in New Orleans would be book-ended by the two events that have most defined the 21st Century, she was almost predestined to have been in that place at that time.

The child of medical missionaries, she says a missionary trip to the Belgian Congo made her parents realize that many of the diseases killing the population were preventable. Already physicians, they returned to the United States to pursue advanced training in public health and community medicine so they could better serve their third-world patients.

Having spent her youth in Haiti observing her parents, Berggren says it was natural not only that she become a physician, but that she specialize in infectious diseases, as well.

She received her undergraduate degree in biology from Oberlin College in Ohio and completed her medical studies at Harvard Medical School.

In her years of practice, she sees that the most astonishing breakthrough with respect to infectious diseases is in the treatment of AIDS. "HIV used to be a death sentence," she states. "That is no longer so. The prognosis is very good. An HIV patient can live 20 to 30 years after diagnosis and have a good quality of life."

In fact, Berggren compares an HIV diagnosis with that of diabetes. "HIV can be lived with, just as diabetes can be lived with," she explains. "It's not fun, but it can be done," she adds, referring to the daily medications required for both illnesses.

Berggren believes that pandemic flu is the greatest immediate threat to San Antonians where infectious diseases are concerned. In the long-term, she is concerned about the responsible stewardship of antibiotics. "I have seen bacteria develop resistance to every medicine that we have come up with," she stresses, which is why she believes physicians must be judicious in dispensing such medication.

An assistant professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, and interim director for its Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics, Berggren is happy to be here. She finds the city's residents relaxed and upbeat, which is a welcome change from the grim demeanor of post-Katrina residents. "There is a positive energy here," she says, adding, "Louisiana was challenging. You couldn't live there without being keenly aware of the disparities that were plainly visible."

The mother of two, Berggren says her eighth and ninth graders are happy here too, as is her husband, Dr. Tyler Curiel, who currently serves as director of the San Antonio Cancer Institute.

**Board Members and Faculty Associates listed in Best Doctors 2008**

Gilberto Aguirre – *Ophthalmology*

Ruth Berggren – *Infectious Disease*

David Boldt – *Oncology and Hematology*

Robin Brey – *Neurology*

Robert Brzyski – *Obstetrics and Gynecology*

Fred Campbell – *Internal Medicine*

Michael Fischbach – *Rheumatology*

Alice Gong – *Pediatric Specialist/Neonatal-prenatal Medicine*

Richard Holt – *Otolaryngology*

Kristy Kosub – *Internal Medicine*

Diane Martinez – *Psychiatry*

Rajam Ramamurthy – *Pediatric Specialist/Neonatal-prenatal Medicine*

Richard Usatine – *Family Medicine*

Jerald Winakur – *Internal Medicine*