



2/12/2026

Dear Willow Award Committee,

It may strike some as odd, but it turns out that very little educational time is typically and intentionally given to the topics of death and dying in medical or nursing or pharmacy school. In the late 1990s, two faculty members—Jon Wolfe, PhD, PharmD and Reed Thompson, MD—at UAMS decided that it was important to talk with health care students about death and the dying process. They developed an elective course in the College of Pharmacy that was made available to medical students as well. That course continues to this day and is available, now, for any student anywhere at UAMS (if they have room in their schedule) to take.

Reed Thompson, MD (a native Arkansan), was a trained ENT surgeon who became concerned about the kinds of care that was available to dying patients. Making a radical decision at the time, Dr. Thompson changed his practice and became the first palliative care physician in the state of Arkansas. His concern and care for patients at the end of life was paradigmatic and inspirational. For many years, he had to go-it alone in the field, but was able to convince the UAMS administration in 2007 to hire Sarah Beth Harrington, MD, as a second palliative care physician (and she has subsequently become the program director, creating the state's only board-eligible palliative care fellowship—she, too, deserves the Willow Award). Sadly, Dr. Thompson died from cancer several years back. Which leads me, then, to Dr. Wolfe.

Jon Wolfe, PhD, PharmD—raised in AR and initially trained as a historian at the University of Virginia—taught briefly at Arkansas Tech, but decided that he might be better able to help people through another professional avenue, and so he went back to school to become a pharmacist. Dr. Wolfe then served UAMS, ACH and the College of Pharmacy for 30 years. He became interested in how clinical pharmacists could assist in end-of-life care, helping keep patients (and families) comfortable over the final days, weeks, and even months of life. Along with Dr. Thompson, Dr. Wolfe designed a course to help his pharmacy students better understand the processes and experiences of dying patients and their families, and he led that course until around 2007 (I forget exactly) when he had to step away for one year and I inherited it—though to this day he still gives a history lecture for one of our class sessions.

So (while I know it is an unusual set of circumstances relative to the typical nomination for a bedside care provider), for making education about death and dying a priority, in order to help healthcare professionals serve patients, families, and the community better in regards to end-of-life care, I would like to nominate Dr. Jon Wolfe for the Willow Award for Excellence in End-of-Life Care.

Thank you for your consideration.

*D. Micah Hester, PHD*

*Chair, Dept of Medical Humanities & Bioethics*