

# Dr. Alan Blum: Capturing the essence of patients in art

**S**ome people doodle and some take notes.

Dr. Alan Blum jots down records of some of his experiences in the form of a sketch.

Those sketches, a loose-knit collection of more 3,000 ballpoint pen drawings spanning a 15-year period, are the subject of an art exhibit at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston ground floor lobby through Jan. 24.

The subjects of Dr. Blum's works are patients, both his own or those he's met in hospital waiting areas or physician offices. They're drawn on whatever the tall, lanky family practitioner has available at the time — prescription pads, drug advertisements or index cards. It takes only a few minutes for him to capture a person's expression and record bits of dialogue.

Dr. Blum, who practices family medicine at the Baylor Family Practice Center at 5510 Greenbriar, gets a "real charge" out of doing his sketches.

That's evident by the look on his face as he carefully leafs through one notebook, describing each of his drawings one by one. "That's one of a 92-year-old woman," he says, "and this man had Alzheimer's disease...here's a woman

an' bothers me. She gets ridiculous mad for nothing," said another.

"You seldom hear people talking like that in plays," Dr. Blum observes. "This is the real thing."

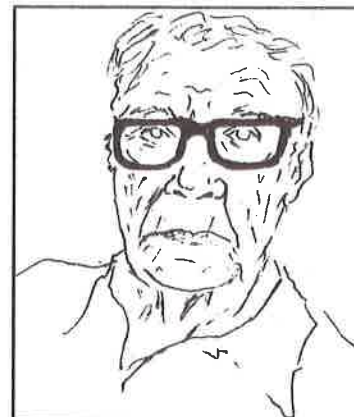
Dr. Blum didn't start out to be an

He started doing random sketches with a leaky black ballpoint pen while in medical school in the mid-seventies. Dr. Blum's drawings have received some national recognition. Eight of his figures were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and in each of the past four years he has won awards of excellence in Baylor College of Medicine's annual art contest.

When he's not sketching or practicing family medicine, Dr. Blum devotes his time to the advocacy of important consumer health issues. In 1977, he founded DOC (Doctors Ought to Care), a pioneering medical organization that assists communities across the country in counteracting

the promotion of unhealthy products, especially cigarettes. He has lectured on the subject in all 50 states and in 1988 received the U.S. Surgeon General's Medalion for his work on countering the promotion of tobacco in the mass media.

—ROSANNE CLARK



whose husband walked out on her. I can remember nearly all these individuals through my sketches, no matter how far back I did the drawing."

Often Dr. Blum puts their stories to poetry and prose. "If you don't be honest with your doctor then there's no point in going to the doctor," one patient told him. "My momma bugs me

artist, much less exhibit his works. "I didn't realize how many sketches I was doing until I filled an old shoebox," he recalls. "I've probably tossed out as many as I've collected and just didn't realize it."

The 43-year-old physician never had any formal art training except for a brief studio art class in college.