



dr. christine dean EPILEPSY INSTITUTE OF NORTH CAROLINA

CHRISTINE RUCKER PHOTO

Upon entering the Epilepsy Institute of North Carolina, it's instantly apparent that it is not a typical doctor's office. Cats live there, dogs visit two at a time, and in one room, a patient practices tai chi.

Dr. Christine Dean, a neurologist, is the medical director and CEO of the Epilepsy Institute. She, along with the late Dr. Kiffin Penry, founded the institute in 1989.

"We are the only community-based comprehensive epilepsy program complete with psychiatric care," she explains.

When she was younger, Dean was on a camping trip when she saw a man fall into a fire while having a seizure. Since then, she's been tirelessly working to combat the disease.

Though epilepsy is a chronic condition, the institute attempts to create a workable lifestyle for patients through interdisciplinary methods. When she meets a new patient, she spends up to two hours going over every aspect of his or her life to make sure she knows what's going on.

"Our emphasis is the patients," she says. "They look just like us, and yet they have a ticking time bomb in their heads."

Patients come from all over the state — even all over the world — to seek treatment. Dean says she's had patients from as far away as Ireland, England, and Canada. No matter where they're from, though, they become part of the family once they're at the institute.

"It doesn't matter what time they get here, or when their planes land — we are here," says Dean, who is on call 24 hours a day.

As for why she loves what she does, Dean concludes, "There's not a day you don't learn something."

—CAROLINE WOLF LONG