

Keeping Jewish

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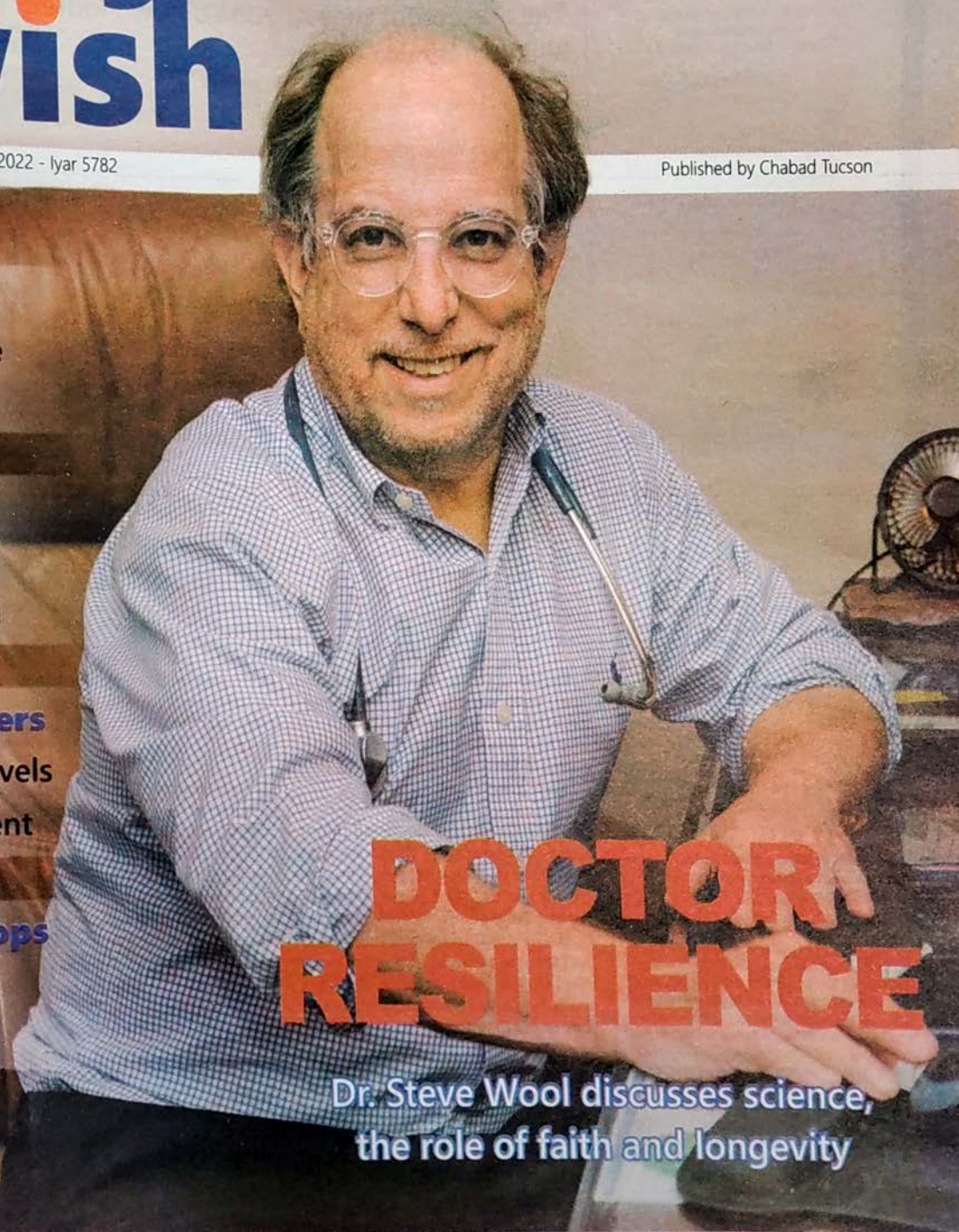
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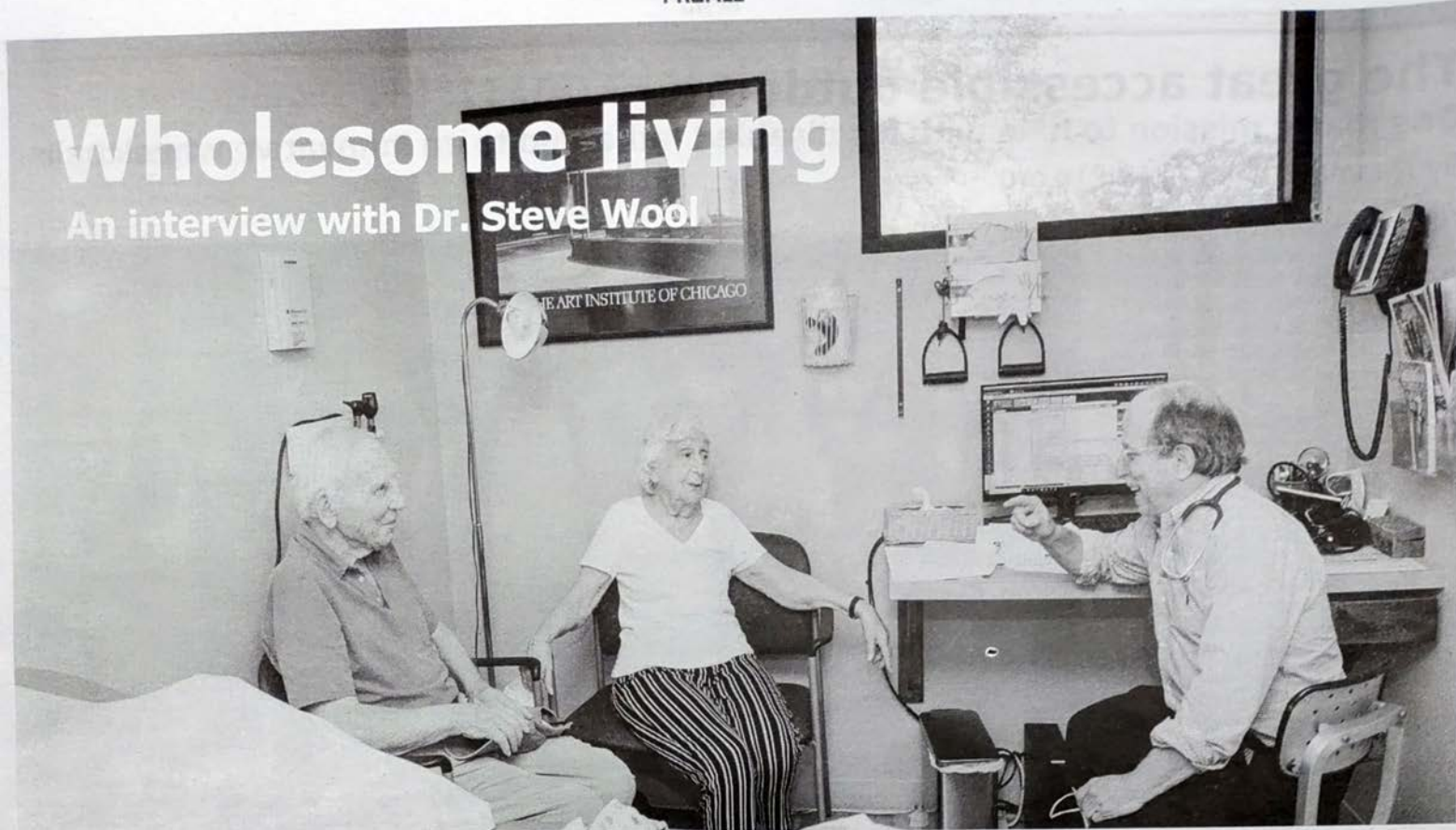
DOCTOR RESILIENCE

Dr. Steve Wool discusses science,
the role of faith and longevity



Wholesome living

An interview with Dr. Steve Wool



Dr. Steve Wool and his patients Richard and Irene Nicolas * Photo: Jacqueline Soffer

When Dr. Steven Wool looks at a patient, he sees a complete human being - not just a diagnosis. He brings his sense of humor, easy laugh, and ability to connect to his medical practice. It is not surprising that he is adored by patients and friends alike.

Born in Waukegan, Illinois, Dr. Wool graduated from Duke University College of Medicine and is Board Certified in Internal Medicine with extensive training and experience in Family Medicine and Geriatrics.

He served as Chief of Medicine at Tucson Medical Center and is a clinical instructor at the Department of Medicine at the University of Arizona. He has been in private practice in primary care in Tucson since 1985 and established Personalized Healthcare of Tucson in 2010. He recently opened a satellite office at The Hacienda at the Canyon retirement community.

In an interview with Keeping Jewish,

he shares his thoughts on health, the role of a Jewish doctor, and the importance of personal connections.

Question: What is the Jewish fascination with doctors?

Dr. Wool: Though often joked about, there is something to be said about Jewish moms wanting their sons to be doctors. My father was a family physician and a general surgeon, my brother is a doctor, and my sister is married to one. There's compatibility between being a doctor and being Jewish. Judaism really celebrates life, and doctors are there to help you keep healthy.

Q: Do Jews tend to listen to medical advice?

Dr. Wool: They don't always listen, but they respect advice (laughs). Our natural inclination is to be lazy about things. But health is a blessing, and it takes hard work. Judaism also requires work. Faith and health are both worth it because the

work results in appreciation.

Q: What is the ideal doctor-patient relationship?

A. The Torah commands us to "guard our lives." It means to be not only healthy but also be proactive about it. Doctors like it when patients take responsibility and see it as a partnership. It is said that patients only remember 30 percent of what a doctor says. So take the time to write down the questions you want to be answered before the visit, and write notes on the answers. If you want your doctor to be honest with you, be honest with your doctor.

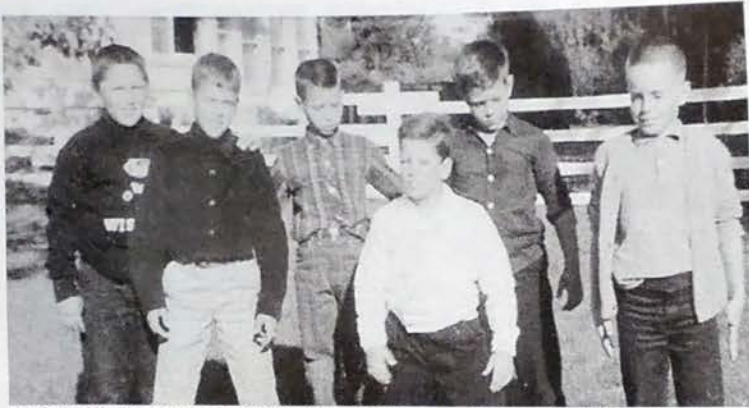
Q: Do you think patients are intimidated by doctors?

Dr. Wool: I once had a patient who came in and commented, "looks like you've gotten fat." I got really upset and started trying to pinch myself in the stomach and the abdomen. He then said, "Doctor, I figured a good offense is the best defense."

I loved that. Physicians are human and don't always do the right thing. They don't eat the right things and exercise the way they should. Rabbi Yossie Shemtov of Chabad Tucson once told me that tolerance is really important. I think as physicians, we need to have respect for other people and not pass judgment on others.

Q: You have books about Maimonides (1138-1204) in your office. What is your fascination with him?

Dr. Wool: He was so brilliant. Many of the things he wrote about diet and nutrition are true today. He exemplified the physician who knows not only medicine but is well-rounded. What made him a great doctor was his vast understanding of other issues. He studied science, philosophy, and of course, religion. Maimonides was also challenged by grief. He lost his brother, who was the family's breadwinner, and it deeply affected him. I can relate to that with the passing of my wife Cindy (in 2008) and being a single dad for three daughters. Maimonides went on



Dr. Steve Wool (center) as a child with friends in Waukegan, Illinois, north of Chicago



Dr. Steve Wool and his daughters (from left) Sonya, Rachel and Lily



Dr. Wool's white coat which typically hangs as photographed by his patient Ben Golden

to make this world a better place, and I think he's a great role model for anybody.

Q: Maimonides also exemplified resilience.

Dr. Wool: Absolutely. Resilience is the number one characteristic that's associated with longevity. If you are resilient, you can deal with change and challenge and live a longer and healthier life. When my wife Cindy died, Rabbi Shemtov was very supportive and made me laugh. And he showed me the way Judaism teaches us to be resilient.

Q: Does your faith have a role in your practice?

Dr. Wool: I have patients who relate to me because I'm Jewish, and they're Jewish. I also have patients who aren't Jewish and are attracted to the fact that I am open about my faith. I think that makes them feel better. Sometimes, they aren't searching for answers (for non-physical challenges). They just want to know that I struggle with the same questions.

Q. What is something people are struggling with today?

Dr. Wool: Loneliness is one of the biggest issues in mental health. The internet and the use of media make us more likely to stay at home instead of engaging with others outside the home. When physical disability gets in, you're not able to interact with others. And Covid only worsened the situation.

Q. What are your thoughts on telehealth?

Dr. Wool: I think it has its value in certain situations, but I find many diagnoses are missed if you don't look at a patient or talk person in-person. Telehealth has value in closely monitoring certain diseases, but I still think you need to see people.

Q: Are you calling for a full return to in-person gatherings?

Dr. Wool: I don't care how many Zooms

you have in the world. You need to talk to people in person. You still should go to shul. I see future events as combining both, especially for those who remain home when not feeling well.

Q. What were the positive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Dr. Wool: There's a greater appreciation of the seriousness of respiratory illnesses and their transmission. There's an understanding of the dangers to vulnerable and at-risk people. It's considered respectful to say, "I'm sick. I'm not coming to a party." This keeps other people from getting sick. Another aspect is the vaccines which utilize technology that saves people's lives. It's almost G-d-like, and I look forward to seeing how this new development can be used for other illnesses.

Q. And that is attributed to major advances in science...

Dr. Wool: I think the study of nature is such a great profession, and it coexists with the spiritual sense. The more you

understand it, the more spiritual you can become because it is so amazing. The beauty of Judaism is that Judaism doesn't let that get in the way of the advancement of science. Throughout generations, if you look at a previous pandemic, like even smallpox, religion sometimes got in the way - but not Judaism. I think that's why we have so many Jewish scientists. To appreciate G-d's world, you have to understand G-d's world, right?

Q: Can you share with us your top tips for living healthier?

Dr. Wool: Drink lots of water. Hydration is one of the most important parts of the quality of health. It filters our kidneys and feeds our minds. You should be drinking all the time, especially in the desert. Try to get better sleep, interact with others, and eat in moderation. Never sit down for a big meal while you're hungry. When you're hungry, you don't have control. I have a snack or an energy drink before going to a meal. Finally, be kind to people. Try to be understanding, empathetic, and accept human frailty.