

Physician at Work

Captivated by Surgery, Balancing Work and Life

John K. Joe, MD, did not enter medical school planning to be a surgeon. But the first time he scrubbed in as a third-year medical student at Vanderbilt, he was hooked, captivated by “the ability to effect change right there on the spot.”

The head-and-neck case he observed took 20 hours and involved the removal of the patient’s jawbone and lymph nodes, a tracheotomy and reconstruction of the jaw using bone from his leg. By the next year, when Match Day rolled around, Joe had decided to train in ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgery. He took a special interest in treating and restoring the appearance of patients with head-and-neck cancer, work he does now in tandem with colleagues in otolaryngology, plastic surgery, medical and radiation oncology and other specialties.

“That experience as a student was life-changing,” says Joe, who came to Yale a decade ago as an otolaryngology resident. “Our ability to reconstruct individuals is one of the few true revolutions in head-and-neck cancer surgery in the last 50 years. One of the unique aspects of this disease process is the impact on the individual with regard to breathing, speaking, swallowing and appearance.”

Joe was born to Korean parents. His father had trained in ENT, rehabilitative medicine and family practice before emigrating to the United States, and once here he repeated all three residencies. When asked as a toddler what he wanted for his birthday, the younger Joe responded that he’d like to fly a kite with his father on a Saturday some

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A Return to Academic Medicine

Heart surgeon Sabet Hashim specializes in repairs of the heart valve, a procedure that has become the preferred treatment for myxomatous degeneration.

The lure of private practice, with its independence and financial incentives, can be stiff competition for a career in academic medicine. Yet for **Sabet W. Hashim, MD**, a nationally recognized cardiac surgeon who joined YMG in April, the return to academia after 20 years in private practice has its own rewards.

“You become more of an expert on something so you can communicate and teach it better,” Hashim says of the academic setting. “You publish, you write papers, you communicate more on a national level.”

In addition, being on the faculty gives him the chance to work with residents, an activity he enjoyed as a community doctor. There are also benefits for the medical school.

“Dr. Hashim represents an important new area for the Department of Surgery,” says **Robert Udelsman, MD, MBA**, chair of surgery. “What he is able to do in patients with mitral valve disease is repair the existing valve, rather than inserting an artificial valve. There are certain significant upsides to being able to use their own valves.”

Patients with their own valves, rather than artificial replacements, won’t need to take blood thinners for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, says **John A. Elefteriades, MD**, chief of the Section of Cardiothoracic Surgery, a repaired valve “is a little friendlier to the pumping mechanism of the heart than a replacement.”

Although all surgeons in the section have experience with mitral valve repair, says Elefteriades, Hashim is probably the most experienced in the state in this type of surgery and is a welcome addition to the section. “He really rounds out the profile of areas of expertise,” Elefteriades says.

Hashim’s interest in this specialty began in the early 1980s when he was on the medical school faculty. In 1984, the world-renowned cardiac surgeon Alain Carpentier, MD, gave a talk about valve repair, and Hashim saw it as a promising new field. Hashim, who grew up in Lebanon and speaks English, French and Arabic, went to Paris for two months to train with Carpentier. “Of



Sabet Hashim, who performs up to 300 operations on the heart each year, recently returned to academic medicine after 20 years in private practice in New Haven.

course,” Hashim says of his family’s stay in Paris, “my wife loved the idea.”

Two years later he left Yale to open his own practice. When he moved back to the medical school this spring after two decades in private practice, Hashim had established a reputation as one of New England’s leading mitral valve surgeons, according to Udelsman. Hashim performs about 300 heart operations each year, mostly involving mitral valve repair. “The valve deteriorates most frequently in this country in what is called myxomatous degeneration,” Hashim says. “It is something you are born with.”

One of the two most important of the heart’s four valves, the mitral valve controls the flow of blood into the heart’s main pumping chamber. If it fails, blood can flow backwards into the lung, ultimately straining and swelling the heart.

Hashim came to the United States in 1975, after completing medical school in Lebanon. Civil war was breaking out there, so he came to New York City, where one uncle taught public health at Columbia University and another did surgical research at St. Luke’s. Although he had planned to return to Lebanon, the civil war raged on. Meanwhile, he married—he met his wife, Donna, a surgical nurse, in the operating room—and they began raising a family. They have five children, three girls and two boys, ranging in age from 10 to 21.

Physician at Work *continued*

day. "My father quit operating that year and practiced exclusively primary care as the sole physician in a rural town outside of Nashville," says Joe.

Surgery is still a highly rigorous and demanding profession, but the culture has changed. During the week, Joe divides his time at YNHH, the VA, the Yale Health Plan and YPB. Along with his research (he's investigating why oral cancer is on the rise among young people, even those who don't smoke or drink heavily), it's a full week, but Joe is at home most Saturdays, like his father. His wife, Cindy, is a teacher, and the couple has a daughter, Molly, 3, and son, Charlie, 2.

"As important as my profession is to me, my first priority is being a husband and father," Joe says. He's even gotten a chance to fly that kite.

Name: John K. Joe, MD.

Title: Assistant professor of surgery, Section of Otolaryngology.

Area of expertise: Head and neck oncologic surgery.

Place of Birth: Baltimore.

Age: 36.

College: University of Pennsylvania.

Med School: Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

Training: Residency in otolaryngology at Yale; fellowship in head and neck oncologic Surgery at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

What is most challenging to you in academic medicine? Finding the appropriate balance among clinical care, teaching and research.

What is most rewarding? Practicing medicine in an environment of continuing learning.

What do you like most about your practice?

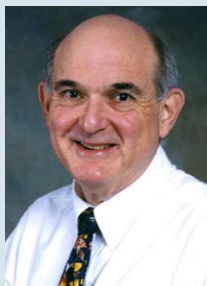
Collaborating in a multidisciplinary fashion with colleagues from various specialties (e.g. radiation oncology, medical oncology, plastic and reconstructive surgery, oral surgery, speech pathology, diagnostic radiology, surgical pathology, nursing, social work).

Personal interests or pastimes: Spending time with wife, Cindy, and children, Molly and Charlie.

Last book read: *What a Difference a Daddy Makes*, by Kevin Leman.

What would you do to improve our clinical environment if you had a magic wand? Improve the methods by which clinical information is recorded, archived and retrieved, in order to facilitate the acquisition of clinical information in a user-friendly manner, while maintaining patient confidentiality.

IN MEMORIAM Norman J. Siegel, MD



A memorial service for **Norman J. Siegel, MD**, an internationally recognized pediatric kidney specialist and founding director of Yale's Section of Pediatric Nephrology, will take place June 5 at 1 p.m. in Battell Chapel. The service will be followed by a reception at the Graduate Club, 155 Elm St., New Haven.

Siegel, who led the American Society of Nephrology as president in 2002, was the former vice chair of the Department of Pediatrics. He served twice as interim chair of the department and as physician-in-chief at Yale-New Haven Children's

Hospital. He was a member of the YMG Board of Governors and chair of the YMG Finance Committee. In addition, Siegel spearheaded many YMG initiatives and led the committee that created the clinician-educator track at Yale. Last year, he headed a school-wide strategic planning process at the request of the dean.

After training in pediatrics and nephrology at Yale from 1968 to 1972, Siegel joined the faculty and became a tenured professor in 1982. He was elected to the American Society of Clinical Investigation in 1983 and held leadership positions in the American Society of Pediatric Nephrology and other national and international organizations. Among his many contributions to medicine are the first classification system for the

pathology of kidney transplant rejection, innovative studies of kidney disease in children and the early use of nuclear magnetic resonance to assess kidney metabolism.

He died April 28 while attending a meeting in California. Dean Robert J. Alpern, MD, called his passing "an irreplaceable loss for the school, his patients and the world of academic pediatrics." He leaves his wife, Rise; his children, Andrew and Karen; his mother, Ida; and his brother Bryan. The family has requested that contributions be sent to The Dr. Norman Siegel Memorial Fund, c/o Janney Montgomery Scott at 555 Long Wharf Drive, 5th floor, New Haven, CT, 06511.

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