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Resident Spotlight: Michael T. Chung, Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery, Chief Resident

GME is pleased to announce that Dr. Michael T. Chung has won the Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS) Award. GHHS is a national organization which seeks to “recognize individuals who are exemplars of humanistic patient care and who can serve as models, mentors, and leaders in medicine.” WSUSOM has hosted a GHHS chapter since 2005. Candidates are nominated by medical students, residents, or faculty, and a committee of GHHS members selects awardees based on their “demonstration of excellence in clinical care, communication skills, compassion, integrity, moral judgement, leadership, and commitment to humanism.”

RT: Where did you grow up and when did you first become interested in medicine as a career?

MTC: I grew up in Southern California and attended UCLA where I majored in biomedical engineering as an undergraduate. During my time at UCLA, I realized the importance of biomedical engineering in medicine, and that as a physician, I would be able to identify problems in clinical practice and propose engineering-based solutions to bridge the gap between the bench and the bedside.

Why did you select Otolaryngology as your specialty?

The field of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery covers an incredible breadth and depth of medical and surgical care. In many ways, Otolaryngology is a gateway specialty, providing opportunities for subspecialization in a diverse set of clinical areas. In fact, Sir Harold Gillies, an otolaryngologist from New Zealand, pioneered many principles that form the basic philosophy for plastic and reconstructive surgery, and he is widely considered the father of modern plastic surgery. I selected Otolaryngology because, like Sir Harold Gillies, I am interested in reconstructive surgery to restore form and function after trauma and oncologic resection.

Did you have mentors or other leadership models during your training? Do you have a particular approach to mentoring younger physicians?

Dr. Henry Vasconez, a plastic surgeon in the University of Kentucky College of Medicine who specializes in craniofacial surgery, was my greatest mentor. Dr. William Stewart Halsted, the first Chief of Surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital, transformed surgical education in the late 19th century by creating a novel program that became the model for surgical residency training in

North America. Halsted's model of "see one, do one, teach one" was based on the idea that trainees should acquire increasing amounts of responsibility that culminated in near-independence. My approach to mentoring younger physicians uses this traditional teaching method.

Could you describe how you felt upon hearing that you had won the GHHS Award?

I have the privilege of working alongside some of the most talented, kindest, and most hardworking physicians there are, so to be recognized for this award is truly humbling and I am grateful.

The GHHS Award "recognizes individuals who are exemplars of humanistic patient care." In your view, what is the role of humanistic approaches in providing optimal clinical care?

Medicine is the embodiment of the human condition. The human condition causes us to seek and encourage the expression of humanity, the condition in the people around us, especially those to whom we are close and for whom we care. Medicine is a career in which I constantly learn more about the intricacies of how the human body works and explore the fundamental nature of different diseases and their treatment options. It is a career in which making connections with others, getting to intimately know other people, their backgrounds, their histories, and their perspectives, is paramount. It is a career in which the primary objective is to promote and encourage the human condition in others, to improve the quality of lives of others so that they may continue to express their humanity.

Maintaining empathy and compassion can sometimes be challenging, as medical training can be demanding and overwhelming. In medicine, we tend to prioritize technical progress, evidence-based medicine, targets and efficiency, which risks a view of patients solely as objects of intellectual interest. There is a need for conceptual clarity if we are to establish a balance between the scientific-technical and psychosocial elements of patient care.

What are your current research interests?

I have diverse research interests. I have published on subjects such as the use of stem cells in tissue regeneration, facial plastic surgery, and microsurgical tissue transplantation.

What are your plans after completing the Otolaryngology residency?

After completing my residency, I plan on pursuing a fellowship in Plastic Reconstructive Surgery. I hope to build a career (a hybrid of academic and private practice positions) where I can help patients as both a scientist and a surgeon and to eventually pass on the lessons I've learned to those who come after.

WSUGME Dept. of Otolaryngology: <https://otolaryngology.med.wayne.edu/>

Gold Foundation: <https://www.gold-foundation.org/programs/ghhs>