

SPOTLIGHT ON: CYNDI YAG-HOWARD, MD

In dermatology, we are fortunate to have many insightful practitioners and great teachers and mentors. Some are bright stars in our special universe — others unsung heroes. All of these colleagues have much to share from wisdom to humor to insights into dermatology and life. This column allows us to gain insight from these practitioners and learn more about them.



Dr. Yag-Howard is in solo private practice in Naples, FL, where she resides with her husband, Corey, who is an internist specializing in prevention and wellness, and their three children. A graduate of Duke University, Dr. Yag-Howard attended medical school and residency at the University of South Florida, where she gained valuable surgical experience treating skin cancer and today serves on faculty.

Dr. Yag-Howard is nationally recognized as a speaker and author on surgical techniques to achieve exceptional cosmetic outcomes. She is also recognized as a leader in organized medicine, serving in many leadership roles for the American Academy of Dermatology and the American Medical Association.

Last year, Dr. Yag-Howard achieved a personal goal by completing the New York City Marathon on her 48th birthday. In this effort, she raised more than \$5,000 to donate to Camp Discovery, an AAD-sponsored camp for children with devastating skin conditions. To this day, her children make bracelets that Dr. Yag-Howard "sells" at her practice for the price of a donation of any amount for the cause.

Q. WHAT PART OF YOUR WORK GIVES YOU THE MOST PLEASURE?

A. I receive pleasure from my work in many, many ways, not just one. I find great satisfaction in making patients feel comfortable and confident in the care that my staff and I provide. When I first walk into the exam room and see that the patient is nervous about a pending surgery or feeling vulnerable about a total body skin examination, I love to help the patient realize that there is nothing to fear. When the patient leaves with a smile on his or her face, I know I have done my job.

I also find great satisfaction in performing surgery, even very complex surgical procedures, with the goal of making the patient look as though he or she never had any surgical intervention. I dedicate a great deal of time studying, practicing and lecturing on surgical techniques that optimize surgical outcomes for the most cosmetically elegant results possible. The before and after photographs are a valuable measure of achieving the aforementioned goal, but the greatest test of success is when I see the patients in follow-up and they say how happy they are with the results. When I see their family or friends whom they have referred, I am honored and know that they will expect the same results, which is a challenge I greet with humility and respect.

Q. ARE AN UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THE HUMANITIES IMPORTANT IN DERMATOLOGY AND WHY?

A. As a novice artist and seamstress, I believe that the creativity and artistry of

the humanities foster a unique enthusiasm to the profession when they can be incorporated into everyday patient care. When doing surgical procedures, from simple closures to complex surgical repairs, my scalpel becomes my paintbrush and my patient becomes my canvas. I am challenged to create a unique and beautiful piece of art that will be aesthetically pleasing to the patient and give me a sense of accomplishment knowing that I gave it my best effort.

Q. WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST REGRET?

A. My greatest regret is that my mother died prematurely at the age of 66 years old. She developed ovarian cancer, which was the one disease that she feared most. She was my best friend and greatest source of encouragement throughout my life. Thankfully, she was able to stay alive long enough to see the birth of our youngest child and hold him for the only photograph of the three of us together. She passed away when he was 10 days old.

Q. WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE RECEIVED AND FROM WHOM?

A. Just before I opened my solo private practice, a physician friend of mine gave me an excellent piece of advice. He said, "Be sure to make time for your family and yourself... and stick to it. Otherwise, your practice will eat you alive." While his words were cautionary and a bit frightening at the time, he was right. There are many responsibilities and obligations that

compete for your attention and try to pull you away from life's most precious assets — family, friends and time. I would advise you to prioritize and appreciate every minute you share with those you love.

Q. WHICH MEDICAL FIGURE IN HISTORY WOULD YOU WANT TO HAVE A DRINK WITH AND WHY?

A. If I had the chance, I would love to meet Leonardo Da Vinci. He was truly remarkable — a genius who had the curiosity and courage to examine, interpret and redefine that which he observed in the world. His creativity and expressiveness allowed him to be a man of the arts, sciences and literature. His creations and inventions were centuries before their time. Although he was not a physician, his analysis of the human body through necropsy enabled him to combine art, mathematics and anatomy for the ultimate creation of the Vitruvian Man. I am fascinated by his vision and ability to meld apparently distinct areas of study. ■



Section Editor: Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCP(C)

Dr. Barankin is a dermatologist based in Toronto, Canada. He is author-editor of six books in dermatology and is widely published in the dermatology and humanities literature.

He is also co-editor of Dermanities (dermanities.com), an online journal devoted to the humanities as they relate to dermatology.

The Dermatologist. 2012 in Review.
December 2012, p 12.