

Dr. Mitchell Posner: hard work is the key to success

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Expert's introduction

Mitchell Posner, MD, currently serves as the Thomas D. Jones Professor of Surgery, Chief of Section of General Surgery and Surgical Oncology, and Physician-in-Chief of the University of Chicago Medicine Comprehensive Cancer Center (Figure 1).

With a reputation earned as a leading authority in the management of upper gastrointestinal cancers, Mitchell Posner, MD, ranks among the country's best doctors. Dr. Posner couples his skill as a cancer surgeon with a commitment to multidisciplinary care, providing his patients with optimal outcomes.

Dr. Posner performs surgical procedures for the treatment of gastrointestinal cancers, including: surgery for pancreatic cancers, the Whipple procedure, laparoscopic pancreatic surgery, liver surgery for cancers, major hepatic resections, surgery for stomach cancers, surgery for gallbladder and bile duct cancers, surgery for esophageal cancers and surgery for melanoma and sarcoma.

Dr. Posner's work goes beyond the operating room. In the lab, he focuses on the molecular basis of malignancies, which has enabled him to design and guide groundbreaking clinical trials for the cancers of the pancreas, esophagus, colon, stomach, rectum, and liver. With more than 30 years of experience, he has won dozens of awards and published 250 articles, abstracts, and book chapters.

Dr. Posner has held several leadership positions during his distinguished career. He is the former-president of the Society of Surgical Oncology. He is the deputy editor for the *Annals of Surgical Oncology*, and the section editor for the gastrointestinal cancer section of the journal, *Cancer*. He served as Chairman for the Gastrointestinal Committee of the American College of Surgeons Oncology Group (ACOSOG).

Interview

HBSN: What leads you to the study of oncology?

Dr. Posner: I was influenced by many people, especially



Figure 1 Dr. Mitchell Posner.

my teachers. When I was a resident, there was a surgical oncologist who had previously trained at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. I just wanted to be like him and to follow in his footsteps.

HBSN: Can you introduce us to your most recent funded research, including its scope, purpose, duration of funding and current status? And how do you expect it to further develop it in the future?

Dr. Posner: My situation is unique, I don't personally have funding. I have collaborated with a scientist, who I have worked with now for over 20 years. We share his laboratory. My surgical residents and my surgical oncology fellows are imbedded inside the laboratory. We go to the lab meetings together. And this scientist is brilliant. I have worked closely with him and we have developed a very, very nice model of how to train young surgeons to be proper investigators who will be successful and productive in the future. Most of my funding was in clinical trials through the National Cancer Institute's Cooperative Group mechanism, but because of

my extensive administrative responsibilities, I'm unable to continue with that effort.

HBSN: *What sort of challenges/difficulties have you encountered during your research or in your team?*

Dr. Posner: I have the same challenges that everybody faces, that funding is much more difficult to now. The current environment in the USA, especially for surgeons, is not conducive to obtain funding for research because you are competing with full-time scientists for the same funding. But that's why we developed this model because that makes it easier for us to successfully compete. So, I think we are able to maintain our level of funding through this sort of model we have created. We will utilize the manpower of our young surgeons who want to be academic surgeons, collaborating with the real scientists, and the combination has proven to be successful and productive.

HBSN: *As a professor, physician, researcher and chief how do you strike a balance among all the duties and relieve stress?*

Dr. Posner: I feel I have very well-rounded life, I work very hard. I always get up at 4:15 in the morning. I'm at work between 5 am and 5:30 am. I always did that so, when my children are sleeping they don't miss me. So I will get my work done early in the morning, then I will be in the operating room or in the clinic. As I become older, I am obviously under more stress. I think you should love what you do. If you love what you do, it's not work. If you love what you do, you will learn how to eliminate stress. So you

must look at the good side. But I think the key is to have a strong commitment to your academic professional life as well as you should have a strong commitment to your family life. I think I have done it very well.

HBSN: *I know you made a speech about mentorship in this meeting, so can you share some contents to us?*

Dr. Posner: Yes, I think it's a little hard to talk about mentorship. Initially, I just talked about the keys to success in academic surgery, which includes having a supportive environment to work in. None of us are born to be effective teachers, you have to work to achieve that prominence. You need to learn the leadership skills that will prove to be effective. At the end of the speech, I gave some advice to the young doctors or the young surgeons about things they can do to help them achieve success.

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Footnote

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