

# **Why Orthopaedic Surgery?**

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# Why Orthopaedic Surgery?

## Orthopedic surgery: Top 10 Reasons to Enter the Specialty

In the *British Medical Journal*, Dr. Alexander Young offered the top 10 reasons to become an orthopaedic surgeon.

- 1** Rewarding and satisfying
- 2** Rapidly improves quality of life for patients
- 3** Combines theoretical knowledge and practical skills
- 4** Combines clinical acumen and technology
- 5** Allows appreciation and application of anatomy
- 6** Wide range of subspecialties to choose from
- 7** Immediate critique of results possible with post-op x-rays
- 8** Wide interaction with multidisciplinary team and industry
- 9** Good support from professional bodies and well-organized training
- 10** Very sociable specialty

From BMJ Careers. Available at <http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/view-article.html?id=20001442>. Accessed April 30, 2012.

## Why Orthopaedic Surgery?

# 33 Orthopaedic Surgeons Offer Reasons Why They Chose the Specialty

## 1

I enjoy working with my hands. I like the immediate feedback of successfully repairing broken bones and correcting deformities. Orthopedic surgery allows me to make an immediate positive impact on patients' lives.<sup>1</sup>

Pamela F. Davis, M.D.

## 2

As a 19 year old sophomore in Tulane's school of engineering, I had a feeling I would become an orthopaedic surgeon. The principles of engineering were simple enough... keep rigid structures from moving and prevent moving structures from becoming rigid. Orthopaedics would allow me to continue my love of mechanics and materials, but instead of building airplane wings in California (my first job offer out of college), I would instead reconstruct a pitcher's "bum wing" in the operating room.<sup>2</sup>

Seth Rosenzweig, MD

## 3

I get to meet new people every day in the office and help them overcome many orthopaedic injuries and conditions. I love the technical nature of surgical procedures and the challenges and subtleties that each individual case presents. Most of all, I love seeing you get better. The most rewarding thing about what I do is seeing someone come in on crutches or in a sling, and then a few months or even weeks later telling them they are ready to return to work, tennis, golf, or walking at the park. Much of the time, that involves conservative treatment consisting of some combination of medications, exercises, injections, and physical therapy, though surgery is needed to address certain cases. Whatever it takes to get you there, we will make those decisions together.<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Carter, MD

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### 4

I always excelled in the math and science segments of my education, and on top of that I've always enjoyed working with my hands. I initially did a lot of ceramics, and wood carving as of late, and quite a bit of woodworking. Becoming an orthopedic surgeon allowed me to really blend the science and medicine with the creativeness that I have with my hands. It's useful in the operating room during orthopedic procedures. I really can't think of another occupation I'd like to do more than orthopedic surgery.<sup>4</sup>

Brian Hallgarth, MD

### 5

"In general, the sort of things that we do in orthopaedics, and especially in orthopaedic oncology, can make a huge difference in people's lives," he says. "I had a patient recently whom we treated for a spine tumor. His wife said to me, 'You gave me my husband back.'"<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Alan Levine

### 6

"I had a good relationship with the orthopaedic surgeons who operated on me when I injured my knee ligament while playing football," says Dr. Clare of his early influences to become an orthopaedic surgeon. "Although I had been considering family practice when I went to medical school, the rotation I did in orthopaedics as a senior medical student made me interested in this specialty."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Patrick Clare

### 7

"Being around my dad and seeing how much he enjoyed his work influenced me a fair amount," he says. "The types of patients he saw in the office and the cases he had done that day were often a topic of conversation at the dinner table. I also became interested in the musculoskeletal system from being in year-round athletic training."<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Michael Clare

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### 8

“What I enjoy about orthopaedics is the ability to treat someone with a physical ailment and improve the patient’s quality of life, and that’s something that I observed my father doing,” he says. Like his father, David also had a lot of exposure to orthopaedics from the surgeries he underwent for sports related injuries. “I had four shoulder surgeries and a couple of knee injuries when I played football in high school and college,” he says.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. David Clare

### 9

“When I played football for the University of Nebraska,” says the younger Dr. Heiser in recalling the influences that drew him to orthopaedics, “I was around the team physician a fair amount, who was Dr. Pat Clare,” he says of his current colleague. “I was hurt a lot; in fact, I felt like I had about every injury that you could have, although none of them required surgery.”<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Thomas Heiser

### 10

I had broken my foot as a high school athlete and, as a result, I had a chance to meet an orthopedic surgeon for the first time. Wearing a cast on my leg for three weeks was a horrible experience and I knew I wanted to help others who were in that same position. I decided at that point that I wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon also.<sup>6</sup>

Jason H

### 11

I enjoy working with the musculoskeletal system. Orthopedic surgery allows me the opportunity to help restore function to patients with debilitating hip and knee arthritis and help them pursue more active lifestyles. More than with most specialties, orthopedic patients tend to improve relatively quickly, especially when they are motivated, making my job more gratifying. Orthopedic surgery is a rapidly evolving field, incorporating some of the most advanced technology, yet we still depend on effective communication and human interaction for our success.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Greg Sirounian

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### 12

Orthopaedic surgery is all about operating on big bones with hammers and chisels and all that and I quite enjoyed it as I learnt my trade. You also get very satisfying outcomes so people come in with a broken bone or an arthritic hip and they can't walk and you fix them up and sometime later they walk out of the hospital. It can sometimes be physically hard because you are in their literally hammering away, but for some people it is actually part of the attraction of carrying out this kind of surgery. It's also working with hands on a big scale.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. David Kan

### 13

No one in my family before me was ever in the medical field. I was born in a small town, in Mitchell, South Dakota, but moved to Fairmont, West Virginia at age four. Growing up, it seemed that the doctors were the ones who had the gratitude of the community. In such a tiny town, there were really no executives, people in corporations, or really anyone who wore a suit to work. We had coal miners, farmers, and people working in shops. Seeing how appreciative the people in the community were to the few doctors in town made that career seem the one which could impact the most lives and make the biggest positive difference. As a child, it seemed, the people I dealt with were the most impacted by the orthopaedic surgeon in our town. I still remember teachers, camp counsellors, and others, telling me how they had been in an accident and broken several bones and how the orthopaedic surgeon allowed them to walk again. That made such an impression on me that I decided quite early to be a doctor and to choose orthopaedic surgery.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Jeffrey Wang

### 14

I love mechanical things—I almost studied to become an engineer—and I love working with my hands. Also, with this field, you get to see outcomes pretty quickly. I appreciate that more exact nature of things. A lot of times with medicine you're dealing with complicated chronic diseases that never really go away. Orthopedics is more straightforward, and you're often dealing with a younger population, so you can really focus in on a problem and solve it.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Jeffrey Saar

### 15

I became a doctor because I enjoy interacting with people and helping to take care of patients. I was mentored by my father, who is also an orthopaedic surgeon. He is a great role model in terms of being a classic physician who serves a community. My father introduced me to not only taking care of fractures and injuries but to forming a relationship with patients and their families that may last a lifetime. Additionally, I've always been interested in sports. As an athlete, I understand what it means to sustain an injury, and I bring this perspective to my patients on a personal

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level. Orthopaedics is a very positive specialty. You can make a dramatic improvement in someone's life by fixing a fracture or reconstructing a joint or muscle. Whether this is operative or non-operative treatment, it allows them to function better and allows them to walk, run, throw or participate in an activity or sport that they were unable to do. You can really make a difference in someone's quality of life. It's exciting especially today because there's so much technology that's been developed to allow us to do reconstructive surgery in a minimally invasive way. One of the things I've focused on is using arthroscopy to treat problems that used to be treated in an open manner. This has dramatically changed patients' ability to rehabilitate. Their pain after surgery is decreased, complications associated with surgery have been reduced significantly, and the patients' rehabilitation and subsequent return to activities, sports or work has been greatly accelerated.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Dan Guttman

## 16

Growing up I was involved in sports from an early age. I sustained many injuries ranging from sprains/strains to dislocated joints and was a patient of physicians in many specialties including family medicine, emergency medicine, and orthopedic surgery. All provided great care, but I developed a special interest in musculoskeletal anatomy during medical school. I decided to pursue orthopedic surgery as a specialty because it provided me the opportunity to focus on and treat disorders of the musculoskeletal system of the body both conservatively and through surgical intervention if necessary. I wanted to help people the same way as my orthopedic surgeon helped me return to my level of play.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Sujal Desai

## 17

My bachelors is in physical therapy. I was a physical therapist for two years before I decided to move on to medicine, specifically orthopedic surgery. As a physical therapist, I worked part time in the clinic with an orthopedic surgeon. In the clinic I had a unique job where I got to function as a resident -- evaluating patients, assessing them and presenting their cases to the orthopedic attending physician. It was a really good learning opportunity. Because of this experience I knew entering medical school that I wanted to go into orthopedic surgery.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Jay Keener

## 18

I always knew I wanted to be a doctor. I also like sports and like rebuilding things, which made orthopaedics a good specialty for me. I knew since junior high that this is what I wanted to do.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Steven Kimberly

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### 19

As a medical student at the University of Colorado, I had the opportunity to do a rotation on the orthopaedic service in the fall of my junior year. The first patient I saw was a 70-year-old woman who had fallen in the spring and fractured her femur while skiing in Vail. Only six months later, we were clearing her to go skiing again the following winter. I thought that was so amazing. There are very few fields of medicine that offer us the opportunity to make that kind of impact on a person's life.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Erik Dorf

### 20

I actually am quite mechanically minded. After I went into medicine, I found this specialty was most to my liking because of that mechanical aspect. When you're fixing broken bones, you're essentially trying to reverse the mechanism of injury and make sure it stays where it's supposed to until it's healed. You often put plates and screws and rods into the bone to keep it there. That's sort of like carpentry skills. Surgery itself is also a "doing" kind of specialty. Rather than waiting for medicine to act, we fix the problem so that you see an instant result. We rarely prescribe medicines at all except to reduce pain after surgery.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Elaine Joughin in an article at the What's Next Illinois website

### 21

I find that one of the most satisfying things about practicing orthopaedic surgery is helping patients recover from their injuries and seeing them return to the activities they love to do.<sup>17</sup>

Matthew C. Reckmeyer, M.D

### 22

Dr. Darius Viskontas developed an interest in orthopaedic surgery after an operation on his shoulder in high school. That experience left him fascinated by the practice of orthopaedic surgery and the satisfying result underscored the impact that this specialty has on the quality of life of its patients.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Darius Viskontas



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I made a conscious decision to become an academic orthopaedic surgeon while a fourth year medical student at Harvard in order to satisfy my urge to understand mechanisms of musculoskeletal disease at the most fundamental level.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Robert Tracy Ballock

### 24

Dr. McPhee's appreciation for how lives are affected by injuries and other orthopedic issues led her to specialize in hand surgery. "People value the use of their hands, and are significantly impacted when that function is compromised," she said. "It is very satisfying to help people get their hands back."<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Erika McPhee

### 25

As a boy I loved sports and working with my hands, so sports medicine was a natural fit for me. After graduating from medical school, I was accepted into a orthopaedic surgery residency at the University of Cincinnati. I then completed a fellowship in sports medicine and shoulder surgery at Duke University, one of the most respected programs in the country. During that time, I helped care for the members of Duke's athletic teams, and I was trained to care for complicated knee and shoulder injuries. "In school and during training, I was taught to diagnose and treat diseases. However, in practice I've learned that patients are not simply a diagnosis. They need to be treated individually based on their specific needs and desires. That's why it's important for me to listen carefully to patients as they describe their symptoms and to understand how their conditions affect their lives. This allows me to tailor my treatment to each individual patient and deliver the best care possible. "My mission as a physician is to make an accurate diagnosis and provide the proper treatment to alleviate my patients' symptoms. The ultimate goal is to allow them to enjoy their lives, whether it means getting them back on the playing field or simply sleeping through the night without pain. "My favorite moments are when I'm seeing patients for their final visits after surgery. There are few experiences more satisfying than having patients thank me for helping them feel better and getting them back to their normal lives."<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Gregory Estes

### 26

And of the various surgical subspecialties, I was most drawn to orthopedics. The fix-it sensation, the satisfaction of accomplishment when you've made something right, is epitomized by orthopedic surgery probably better than any other specialty. Most often, orthopedic patients have problems that are fixable. You screw something back together,

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rebuild it, or strengthen it. You make your patient's life better in some obvious way that leaves him or her happy with the outcome and gives you a sense of fulfillment as a physician.<sup>22</sup>

From the book *Seeing Patients: Unconscious Bias in Health Care*

### 27

Toward the end of college and the beginning of medical school at George Washington University, Dr. Reff became friendly with an orthopedist who was involved with a sports team. "He invited me to the football games at the University of Maryland, and it look exciting to me," he said. "I got a chance firsthand to see what a doctor in the field was doing. During medical school, I knew I was ready to be a surgeon. I had an interest from day one in the anatomy lab. I had no problem with dissection...In my third year of medical school, during my pediatrics rotation, I did my project on Little Leaguer's elbow, I was gravitating to orthopedics."<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Richard Reff in the book *On Becoming A Doctor: Everything You Need To Know About Medical School ...*by Tania Heller

### 28

The most rewarding aspect of my career involves helping a patient, be it an athlete or workers' comp patient, or just someone who has a problem get back to their pre-injury status - particularly, if the person has had a rather severe injury and/or if he or she has had a difficulty for a long time. It is quite rewarding to effect a change ins omeone's life.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Champ Baker in the book *What Can I Do Now? Exploring Careers In Your Future*

### 29

When I was in medical school, I decided I wanted to be a surgeon. I felt that the rewards of operative intervention and treatment of patient problems was much greater than the medical side of things.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Bill Grana in the book *What Can I Do Now? Healthcare*

### 30

It was during college that I became interested in orthopedic surgery as a career. As a collegiate varsity football player, I had the unfortunate opportunity to get to know our team's orthopedic surgeon on several occasions. However, I was able to capitalize on that relationship and, after shadowing him for one month, my career path was set. Orthopedics allows me to pursue many of my interests, such as biology; mechanics; and athletics to name a few. It also allows me to treat patients from every stage of life.<sup>25</sup>

Robert J. Purchase, MD

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### 31

I was involved in athletics throughout my high school and college careers and that led me to want to become a team physician. I was a SEC pole vault champion at LSU and when I finished my undergraduate I was then accepted to LSU Medical School. It was obvious that first, I wanted to be a doctor and second, I wanted to continue to be involved in sports. That desire led me to orthopedic surgery and later into sports medicine. Therefore, my career was jump-started because of my love of athletics and also my grandfather planting a seed in my mind to be a doctor. In medical school, I became really interested in orthopedics and I was also extremely interested in rehabilitation that is physical therapy.<sup>26</sup>

Dr. James Andrews

### 32

I always put the toys together for Christmas. My dad was hopeless at that! I was also an orthopedic patient all my life -- a congenital hip problem -- which I know influenced me. Many people, male and female, become interested in orthopedics through their own bone problems or through sports.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Lisa DeGnore in an article at the What's Next Illinois website

### 33

During my junior year in medical school, I spent a little time in each medical specialty, and nothing excited me like orthopedics. I like solid, predictable results. I love math. I understand and love anatomy. It was natural that I should go from physical therapy to orthopedics. Most orthopedic patients have the potential to improve dramatically based on my treatment. Most patients aren't sitting on death's door. They're mentally positive and believe that the treatment rendered will make them better. There's usually a very direct correlation between the treatment rendered and the result. It's very positive, rapid feedback.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Ruth Thomas in an article at the What's Next Illinois website

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