

# Future Star Robin D. Tsai, DPM



He stresses the importance of building awareness of our scope of practice.

BY MARC HASPEL, DPM

Facing personal adversity can often spark passion when choosing one's career. Such is the case for the next candidate in *Podiatry Management's* Future Stars in Podiatric Medicine, Robin D. Tsai, DPM. Having a father beset with disability from polio, Dr. Tsai learned early on the potential benefits of a career in podiatry. He appreciated the benefit of pursuing a career where restoration of function to those patients with compromised lower extremity function is of prime importance. Doctor Tsai recently took the time to discuss his early career, his inspiration for practice and his thoughts on his future, and the future of his chosen profession.

**PM:** Who in podiatric medicine influenced you the most thus far in your career? To whom else do you give thanks?

**Tsai:** The mentors who have most shaped my career are Dr. Laura Shin, Dr. David G. Armstrong, and Dr. Tanzim Khan. I trained under them during residency and now continue to learn from them in fellowship at Keck Medicine of USC. Their expertise in limb salvage and reconstructive surgery, along with their commitment to advancing the field, has had significant influence on my development as a podiatric surgeon. I would also like to thank my resi-

dency director, Dr. Bobak Alavynejad, who taught me not only how to practice medicine but also how to practice empathy; reminding me that skill means little without compassion.

**PM:** What first attracted you to a career in podiatric medicine?

**Tsai:** My father was my greatest inspiration. He is a paraplegic, wheelchair-bound from post-polio syndrome, and growing up I witnessed firsthand the challenges that come

main in academic medicine. I would like to continue my work in limb salvage and reconstructive surgery while contributing to the training of future surgeons.

**PM:** What College of Podiatric Medicine did you attend? Where, and how would you describe your post-graduate training?

**Tsai:** I attended Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science at the Scholl College of Podiatric

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with limited mobility. That experience drew me to foot and ankle surgery, where restoration of function isn't just a medical procedure, but a chance to give people back independence and quality of life. That mission gives my work both purpose and joy.

**PM:** What are your goals both short-term and long-term for your career in podiatric medicine?

**Tsai:** In the short-term, my focus is on gaining as much knowledge and experience as possible during fellowship. Long-term, I aspire to re-

Medicine. I then completed residency training at West Covina Medical Center, which is affiliated with Keck Medicine of USC and Rancho Los Amigos. At West Covina, I gained extensive experience in trauma and rearfoot surgery, while my rotations at USC and Rancho Los Amigos emphasized limb salvage and complex reconstruction. Following residency, I chose to remain at Keck Medicine of USC to pursue fellowship, allowing me to continue advancing my skills in limb preservation and reconstructive surgery.

*Continued on page 79*

Dr. Tsai (from page 78)

**PM:** *What are your thoughts about APMA, the certifying boards, and other organizations that function within the profession?*

**Tsai:** Organizations such as APMA and the certifying boards play a critical role in advancing podiatric medicine. They advocate for this profession, uphold rigorous standards for training and certification, and help shape how podiatric medicine is perceived within the

do know is that I value teaching and engaging with residents and medical students, which makes the academic setting especially appealing. At the same time, I remain open to both small and large group practices, as each offers unique opportunities to grow as a surgeon and educator.

**PM:** *Where do you see your career being in 10 years, 20 years?*

**Tsai:** In 10 years, I hope to be a more seasoned surgeon, actively engaged in residency training and

surgical training. Adding to that, podiatry in the United States is unique compared to many other countries where it isn't considered a surgical specialty. To continue drawing strong individuals, podiatry needs to increase awareness of the breadth of the scope of practice, highlight the role of podiatric surgeons and specialists, and ensure that students see the full impact the profession has on patient care.

**PM:** *Would you be in favor of degree change as well as name change from the term "podiatric" to "foot and ankle" medicine?*

**Tsai:** I wouldn't be opposed to a degree or name change, though I think the value depends on the setting. For the general population, "foot and ankle medicine" is clearer and more immediately understood, while "podiatric medicine" often creates confusion. At the same time, the historic identity of the profession carries meaning, as podiatry was not always primarily surgical. Even within professional circles, there remains some lack of understanding about the full scope of podiatric medicine, so any change should balance clarity for patients with respect for the history of the field.

**PM:** *In the event you are raising a young family, how are you managing a busy work/life balance?*

**Tsai:** I'm very fortunate to have a strong support system. I married my high school sweetheart, and both of our families are closely connected and supportive of one another. That foundation makes all the difference. In addition, having good colleagues and mentors around me has helped me manage the demands of training while still prioritizing family. **PM**

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larger healthcare community. I respect the important work they've done to unify and represent this field, but I also believe their continued success depends on transparency and responsiveness to the needs of physicians across all career stages. Looking ahead, their greatest impact will come from fostering unity, building stronger collaborations with other specialties, and ensuring that podiatric physicians are recognized as integral members of the surgical and medical community.

**PM:** *What sub-specialties interest you in podiatric medicine, and why?*

**Tsai:** My subspecialty interest lies in limb salvage and reconstructive surgery. The ability to preserve mobility and restore function for patients facing complex pathology is both challenging and deeply rewarding. I find tremendous joy in helping people get back on their feet and return to the activities that give their lives meaning.

**PM:** *What type of practice arrangement, i.e. solo, small or large group, suits you the best?*

**Tsai:** I haven't committed myself to one practice model just yet. What I

mentorship. In 20 years, I aspire to have built a lasting academic career and maybe even contribute to new surgical techniques.

**PM:** *What are your thoughts on the overall role of podiatric medicine in the current healthcare system?*

**Tsai:** Podiatry has established a strong foothold in the healthcare system, though it's often narrowly associated with the diabetic foot. In reality, the scope is far more expansive. My experiences at centers like USC and Rancho Los Amigos have shown me how much impact podiatrists can have in neurological conditions such as cerebral palsy and spinal cord injuries, as well as in trauma and functional restoration. This specialty has the ability to profoundly improve mobility, independence, and quality of life for patients across diverse backgrounds.

**PM:** *What should this profession do to continue to attract sound quality individuals like yourself?*

**Tsai:** One of the biggest challenges in attracting top talent is that podiatry is often misunderstood. Many people don't fully recognize the scope of our practice, the depth of the education, or the rigor of the



**Dr. Haspel** is senior editor of this magazine and past-president of the New Jersey Podiatric Medical Society. He is a member of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management.