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Interview with Dr. Patrick Lento

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Interview with Dr. Patrick Lento

Q&S Managing Editors

Dr. Lento was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He received his college degree from Fordham University and his medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine. Following receipt of his medical degree, he completed residencies and was board certified in both Internal Medicine and Pathology at Mount Sinai Medical Center in NYC. In 2012, Dr. Lento joined New York Medical College and currently serves as the director of the Pathology-Pathophysiology Teaching Program for the medical school. In addition to his role as an educator, he also holds an appointment as a staff attending in the Department of Pathology at Westchester Medical Center.

Q&S: When and why did you decide you wanted to become a physician?

Dr. Lento: Oh, that's an interesting question. To be quite honest with you, I don't know if there was a specific time when I decided. My parents would say it was when I was in first grade and we were asked to draw a picture of what we wanted to be when we grew up. I drew a picture of a doctor. However, my mom was a nurse so I was exposed to the medical field during my entire childhood. I certainly enjoyed the sciences growing up and interacting with people, so I think it seemed natural for me.

Q&S: Why and how did you know that Pathology was your vocation?

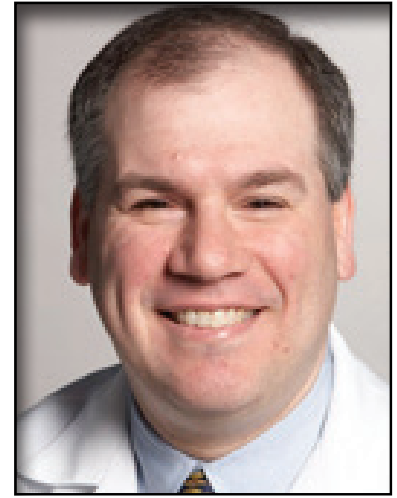
Dr. Lento: I didn't know it coming out of medical school, because I didn't go into Pathology. When I graduated from medical school, I went into residency in Internal Medicine. During my residency, I started to think about what my long-term goals actually were. I really enjoyed teaching and I wanted teaching to be a large part of what I did on a day-to-day basis as a physician, and I was concerned that I might not have such an opportunity as a General Internist. As a result, I began to reconsider my original decision to go into Internal Medicine and started to look at Pathology as a more viable option of a career where I could still incorporate the investigative work that you might do as an Internist as well as teach. So, I did a second residency in Pathology, and I got to teach essentially every day from that point on. The rest is history.

Q&S: Did you go straight from one residency to the next? Or did you work as internist in between?

Dr. Lento: I went from my Medicine residency into my Pathology residency. I was boarded in both Medicine and Pathology, but I went into practice in Pathology.

Q&S: When and why did you begin to teach? And how has being a teacher changed you, if at all?

Dr. Lento: I would actually say that I started to teach as a medical student, because you interact with your peers and you are always teaching each other things. If I look back on it right now, I think standing at the anatomy table with my classmates in the first year of medical school was the first time I felt like I was teaching. We were doing the dissections and constantly showing each other what we knew. That was really an exciting time. I loved Gross Anatomy and my enthusiasm continued to grow in second year, third year, and so on. As an intern during residency, you help teach medical students, and because we need to educate our patients, they are, in a sense, also your students. You need to be able to modify your teaching approach in order to accommodate the different levels of understanding of each of these groups.



In Medicine, interestingly, you are constantly in the role of both teacher and student, and that continues even when you become an attending. I learn new things every day, because I certainly do not know everything. It's a humbling experience, but it's also something that drives me and helps make my life exciting. Still, I enjoy teaching the most. In Medicine, we endeavor to pass on our knowledge and approaches to learning to our students. And, whether we think about it or not, we are helping to mold or form the next generation of physicians who will then carry on that tradition with their own students. That's what medicine is all about—it isn't just about caring for patients, but it is taking our craft and passing it along to the next generation.

Q&S: How and when did you come to New York Medical College?

Dr. Lento: I just started my fourth year here at New York Medical College. I spent just under 20 years at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Manhattan. There, I was a practicing Pathologist and I ran the autopsy service. I was also, for a time, the Cardiac Pathologist for the Department and the residency program director for Pathology. Additionally, I taught at the medical school.

When the opportunity to join NYMC became available, I was excited. The job here at NYMC was different from what I was doing at Sinai but it was a great opportunity to continue to

grow and learn. Looking at the scale or the balance of things, my job at Mount Sinai was primarily geared toward the service work of Pathology, together with some teaching. In my new position here at NYMC, my focus is predominantly on the teaching program, but I still hold a position in the Department of Pathology at WMC. And it has been a lot of fun—four years of doing something I really enjoy!

Q&S: Was Dr. de la Garza a part of Mount Sinai at the same time with you?

Dr. Lento: When I was a junior attending at Mount Sinai, Dr. de la Garza was a resident in our training program for a short period of time. She went on to finish her residency in a different institution in another state and then did her fellowship in Forensic Medicine before returning to NYC to serve in the medical examiner's office for a couple of years. She was hired by NYMC about six months before I was. It wasn't easy to leave the-home-away-from-home that Mount Sinai had been for me for nearly 20 years but seeing some familiar faces in my new job at NYMC helped ease my transition.

Q&S: What inspires you most about Pathology?

Dr. Lento: I don't know if it's any one particular thing. I would say number one, there's always something to learn. Especially in today's world of medicine where there is so much information out there. I'm probably inspired most by people who are able to take that information and distill it so that they can explain it in a way that is meaningful and understandable. It can be daunting to think about what one needs to know to be a physician. Perhaps, that is why many people choose to subspecialize. In addition, teamwork in Medicine is vital to the care we provide for patients. The teams don't just consist of physicians but also include nurses and other healthcare professionals.

I'm also inspired by those who teach, because I like to look at the teaching styles of different people and try to learn from them. I'm always looking for new ways to help my students.

Q&S: Do you ever have the sense that art and Pathology are similar in any ways?

Dr. Lento: We often hear about the "art of medicine." I think this is where the science and the practice of Medicine meet. The practice of medicine also depends upon the experience of the individual, and everybody has had different experiences. In addition, the human body can be considered to be a piece of art. Again, I am reminded of my Gross Anatomy class as a medical student because I found the experience to be fascinating and awe-inspiring. In many ways, I think that's what art does for people—whether it's a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of music—art inspires people. And, I think that's what the human body does for many of us who go into medicine. While we're inspired to learn more about it, we want to be

able to translate that knowledge into meaningful care for our patients.

Q&S: What is the weirdest thing that has happened during one of your lectures or small groups?

Dr. Lento: Well, I don't know if this would count as weird, but I've had some student groups dress up in costumes and present a case scenario in CPC. I also had one group put on a skit using one of the cases we were trying to discuss in CPC as if it were an episode from the television show *House*. These were quite funny experiences that I think allowed the students

to maintain their creativity while learning. It can be difficult to maintain a sense of who you are during medical school. In addition, innovative ideas in Medicine can potentially stem from such creativity.

When I was at another institution, I also had a student have a seizure

at the beginning of one of my lectures. [The student must not have been thrilled that I was giving the lecture (joke)]. Actually, it was a scary moment. I had another student run to get help while I ran over to the student to try to provide some aid. Although it was a serious situation, the student recovered and, thankfully, was ok afterward.

Q&S: What is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

Dr. Lento: I'll give you a funny answer and a serious answer. The funny answer is that it can be like the movie *Groundhog Day*, where we experience the same thing over and over and over again. Ha! The students are obviously different, but the topic is always the same. From a serious standpoint, however, the main challenge is trying to assure that you can reach all students no matter where they sit on the bell-shaped curve of performance.

Q&S: What's your most memorable moment as a professor here at NYMC?

Dr. Lento: Well, aside from my first days working here, the first thing that comes to mind, which may or may not be the most memorable, is having the opportunity to participate as a hoodler at the graduation ceremony in Carnegie Hall this past May. This was particularly special for me because the graduating students were the students from my very first class as a course director here at NYMC. As teachers, we want to see our students succeed. Graduation is the culmination of the four years of hard work on the part of both students and educators. It is a time for us to celebrate.

Q&S: That sounds like a really exciting moment.

Dr. Lento: Not just for the students! It is certainly something that I look forward to. I sometimes make the analogy of being a parent with that of being a teacher, but not in a condescending way. As parents, you always want to see your children suc-



ceed and you want the best for them. In a similar fashion with our students, we want to see them succeed and have the best opportunities as physicians down the road. The students' successes are our successes as well. And, it's very exciting when we get to see that.

Q&S: What did you love most about being a medical student?

Dr. Lento: I really enjoyed the learning aspect of it. I found it challenging, as most people do, but I really enjoyed trying to learn everything there is to learn, if that's even possible! The other thing I really enjoyed was working together with other students. I was fascinated by how much I could learn from my peers. Everyone had something to offer and, to use the phrase of a very good friend of mine from medical school, I felt like I was a sponge waiting to soak up water. The knowledge that was out there was like the water and I was trying to soak up as much of it as I could. I also enjoyed the lasting friendships I made while in school and the time spent on some of my rotations with my peers. While Gross Anatomy stands out as the time we started our journey in Medicine, my 3rd year surgery rotation also stands out. The surgery clerkship was a very difficult rotation, but we were all in it together. Interestingly, I wouldn't say that I felt like I was having fun during my surgical clerkship at the time, but when I look back at my medical school experience, it is actually the one clinical rotation that is most memorable for me. I believe that it is because we all worked extremely hard and bonded during the experience.

Q&S: If you could give advice to medical students, what would it be?

Dr. Lento: I don't think we have enough time to cover that! Well, if I look back on my own experience, I think it's important to recognize that you want to choose a career path that

you're going to be good at, but you also want to choose something that you're going to enjoy. If you don't enjoy what you're doing, I think it's going to be very difficult to be good at it and it will be difficult to continue to do it over a long period of time. The second thing I would offer is that it is possible that you might not choose the right field the first time out of the gate. Again, I'm speaking from experience. I always thought that I would be an internist in private practice but, as it turns out, that wasn't the best fit for me given my career aspirations, and I ended up switching into another field. Sometimes in life, you need to take a step back, reassess, and move in another direction, and that's okay!

Q&S: Do you have any specific advice in terms of being a successful medical student in the academic science years?

Dr. Lento: There are two things I think are important. Students should drive their own education as much as possible. I think that you need to constantly be trying to seek out answers; be inquisitive, ask questions, then look for the answers. Don't expect that you are always going to be given the information you need. I know that's not an easy task but you want to take the inquisitive nature that attracted you to Medicine in the first place and allow that to continually drive your learning as you climb the ladder of your training.

The other thing that I think is extremely important is to seek out and find good mentors. Look for people that inspire you and will support your continued development as a physician and as a person. You may find more than one person who might serve in that capacity. Each mentor you identify may have something different to offer. Use the examples they set for yourself, as you move forward. You need to find the people who will serve not just as role models but as guides along the way. Good mentoring is invaluable.