



Cover story

# HEALER OF BONE BANES

Orthopaedics is a specialty of immense breadth and variety. We speak to orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Sambhav Shah who helps you understand the systematic operational rules of this field



**I**t is a privilege to be entrusted the orthopaedic care of an individual. The same entails responsibility to make an accurate diagnosis, discuss all options and then, in partnership with a well-informed patient, embark on the treatment plan that will produce the best, safest, timeliest recovery and a lot more. Dr Sambhav Shah who brings experience from the Queen's Medical Centre Nottingham, UK guides you on orthopaedics as a career.

**WHEN AND HOW DID YOU STUMBLE UPON A CAREER IN ORTHOPAEDICS?**

BY DR PRADEEP KUMAR | 22 FEBRUARY 2024

I wouldn't really say I stumbled upon this career choice. My father is an orthopaedic surgeon and I have grown up seeing him work in this field, spend countless hours as a child in his clinic and seen the immense satisfaction he gets out of helping his patients. I feel like I was cut out for this profession and have known it since a while, so when the time came for me to make the much-debated career decision, it was a piece of cake. Medicine is really not a field you just decide to pursue because your best friend is doing so or because your parents want to see their child as a doctor. Personally, I could always see that "Dr" written in front of my name on

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the door of my practice just like my father. However, while doing my residency in orthopaedics, I realized that operating on the spine gave me the most job satisfaction. I felt that I won a war because spinal surgeries are the most difficult ones and require high skill set. Hence, I further specialized as a spine surgeon and put in 6 more years of training. So, I followed what I've always wanted to be, my dream and here I am.

**WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED TO SUCCEED IN THE PROFESSION?**

When it comes to being a doctor, it is no secret that it is a long and tedious process to acquire the degree. Years of hard work, exams after exams, battling the unfortunate issue of many quotas to get yourself admission in the best institution and the competition to get in is 1. However, 2-3 degrees including fellowships, in order to be the best, might take a toll on you. Patience and focus are key to surpass all these obstacles in this field.

Additionally, aside from the obvious educational qualities, there are several characteristics a doctor needs to have in order to succeed in this profession. Getting to know your patients, being approachable and being a good listener are only a few of the traits one needs to possess. There are times when our patients cannot express themselves correctly and pin point on what the problem is. At that point of time, as a doctor, we need to listen carefully to their plea, comprehend it and ask the right questions in order to diagnose the issue correctly. A lapse in our judgement is not acceptable in our field so listening well, paying attention to the patient's dialogue, examining thoroughly and acute concentration is a must. Of course, in addition to this, it is necessary to have a steady hand and be able to focus for hours when we are in surgery. Most important is to continuously update ourselves with the latest in medical developments.

**SOMETHING THAT KEEPS YOU GOING?**

My passion for helping people, my love for the study of medicine and my goal of being the best in the field is what really keeps me going. There have been many times when I have felt like just giving up in midst of my education, but something my father told me always rang in my ears when such a thought passed my mind. He said "The path is not an easy one that you have taken. But at the end of the day the satisfaction and gratitude you get when you treat a person and help them to live longer and healthier, there is nothing in this world that is comparable to

that. And that day, you will realize that it is all worth it." I held onto his advice not only back then but even today and that is the reason what and where I am today. In order to excel myself in spine surgery, I have trained and worked in U.K, Singapore, Milan, Germany to name a few, sometimes with my wife and children and sometimes without. But my focus did not deter. It took time but I have accomplished what I wanted, all with the help of determination, my family and my love for medicine.

**TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE MOST DIFFICULT PATIENT YOU TREATED AND HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH IT?**

My 85-year-old grandfather. He was suffering from severe leg pain and back pain. Also, he was already operated 15 years ago for his low back issue but started developing severe pain again which restricted his mobility. He also had issues in his upper limbs due to compression of spinal cord in his neck. He failed conservative management for many years. Finally, my grandfather dropped the ball in my court and left it to me to decide his fate. As his quality of life had deteriorated significantly I asked him to undergo surgery. The next question was who will operate on him? As a surgeon one tends up believing with time that he's the best and I would not want any second best surgeon to carry out the surgery. Hence, I decided to operate him myself. The decision was difficult as during the T10 surgery on his back and neck anything could have happened. He could have died on table owing to his age or woken up paralyzed after the surgery and I would have to live with that blame. Once surgery was over and he was out of anesthesia talking and moving his legs, I had a sigh of relief as well as pride. I had a big smile on my face as the first thing he told me was "I was in the best hands possible, I knew I will walk again".

**A PIECE OF ADVICE FOR THOSE WANTING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN THIS FIELD?**

Study hard, do your best, keep plugging along, and don't get discouraged. If you put in the effort, you will reach your goal. Whatever your medical interests might be—pediatrics, orthopaedics, medicine, oncology—make a point to seek out doctors in those specialties so you can interview and perhaps even shadow them for an afternoon so that you can affirm that this is the field you want to enter. Don't go by herd mentality, ever! Determination, focus and a sharp mind will get you places in this field. Education and academics is very important as well, so don't deter from your goal. 📌

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