



American Healthcare Professionals and Friends for Medicine in Israel

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Dr. Tomer Adar is trying to save people from cancer before they ever get it.

Adar, the APF 2015-2016 Claire and Emmanuel Rosenblatt Foundation fellow, is a gastroenterologist who specializes in gastrointestinal cancer genetics.

What does this mean?

Adar, 37, not only practices general GI medicine, he also works with familial cancer tendencies in the lower GI tract, the intestines.

“In gastroenterology there is a growing recognition of the syndromes that might cause people to develop cancer,” says the Tel Aviv native. “In other cancers we talk about ‘early diagnosis’ and mean finding the tumor when it is still small and localized. But in the GI field, we try get to cancer before it actually occurs.

“Prevention really is the name of the game when cancer is involved.”

“We are noticing cases of familial cancer tendencies” says Adar, who works at Shaare-Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem. “So, if we identify families at high risk for developing cancer, we can now recommend surveillance, tailored to their specific situations. The “surveillance” (which may include endoscopy {standard and wireless capsule}, MRI’s and more), is aimed at identifying lesions at the pre-cancerous stage. Other tests may also be indicated, because different organs may be involved in different syndromes.

“If you make a correct diagnosis and identify a genetic syndrome, you may really help a family,” he says. “There’s a possibility for two outcomes – you may be able to identify those who have this genetic change and those who don’t. And based on this

fact, you design a situation-specific surveillance program for those who do. And those who don’t are spared multiple tests, some of which take place every year.

“We also have the privilege of caring for entire families.”

For this work he heads a specialty gastro-genetic clinic in collaboration with a genetic counselor. “It’s a ‘one-stop-shop,’ so to speak. The patients meet both me and the geneticist. We hear the medical history together and provide our recommendations for both genetic testing and endoscopic management.”

The Adar family: wife Adi, 33, a pediatrician; daughter Ella, 7 and son Arbel, 5 live in Modi’in, a city half-way between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. In addition to his position at the gastro-genetic clinic, Dad Tomer is a senior gastroenterologist in the hospital’s Digestive Diseases Institute and a senior physician in internal medicine.

Adar is spending two years at Boston’s world-famous Massachusetts General Hospital, where he is working on the medical center’s equally well-known Gastrointestinal Cancer Genetics service.

The Rosenblatt fellowship provides \$25,000 a year to a top Israeli oncologist receiving post-doctoral fellowship training in North America. Adar has authored over 30 journal articles, reviews journals, edits a website and has also presented work internationally. He teaches medical students and mentors dissertation writers.

In 2013 he was awarded a National Scholar award from the organization United European Gastroenterology (UEG). Adar is very active in UEG, and is a member of its Young Talent Group which

promotes initiatives for young gastroenterologists and researchers.

Adar found his first ties to science and research in high school where he was privileged to participate in a special two-year research biology class in which students were allowed to spend one day a week at the nearby Volcani Institute. "Students in the 11th and 12th grades got to go into the labs and join specific projects for two years. I really enjoyed my time there and even spent some time there in the summer between those years.

"That really oriented my priority toward research. It seemed like a great challenge."

Adar also said that he became interested in not just lab work, but in patient contact and that became primary for him. "Treating patients is a great privilege. I think that the education I received at home and in my community about the fact that being of service to people was of value, just helped to meld everything."

After military service he attended medical school at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, completed his internship at Assaf-Harofe Medical Center near Tel Aviv and residencies in internal medicine at Hadassah Medical Center and in gastroenterology at Shaare-Zedek.

When Adar started medical school he was certain he'd become a pediatrician. "I was sure I wouldn't be in internal medicine or ophthalmology.

"But then I saw internal medicine (a prerequisite specialty for gastroenterology) as just amazing! It's very complex and interesting.

"Within internal medicine, gastroenterology is one of the most challenging specialties. It involves understanding multiple organ systems and their functions.

"It involves various types of conditions – inflammatory, infectious, functional, malignant and more. It also has a variety of treatment options – medical and interventional such as removing

polyps, treating gastrointestinal bleeding, and more."

Adar says another reason he chose his specialty is because "You really can impact a patient's health and quality of life" in this area. "I also had great mentors in this field."

Toward the end of his GI residency Adar found the field of GI genetics more and more appealing, fascinating even. So much so, that after residency he traveled to Barcelona for an intensive clinical and research preceptorship in digestive malignancies, including genetics.

Above all though, what he truly loves about his work and finds unique to the GI field, is patient contact. "It is very important to listen to the patient, to understand what he/she describes. By doing this, you can often save patients from unnecessary, invasive procedures."

Adar's APF Fellowship is one of research with limited clinical exposure. While he does not see patients independently, "I take part in the discussions and decision-making concerning the patients and you can learn a lot from that."

He has joined several on-going projects in his department. Most of his time is spent on research, particularly with clinical trials involving patients. And a lot of time is spent on the computer, doing literature and data base searches.

Since it is not a clinical fellowship, work hours are limited to about no more than about 12 a day and no weekends and nights "on-call." (The weekends have been full of travel around New England.) "But a fellowship is what you make of it and it's a privilege; we aren't here to sit back and take it easy.

"I do, however, miss performing procedures."

Back home, Adar does endoscopies two full days a week. He divides the rest of his time between general and specialty work, including his gastro-genetic clinic, his inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) clinic and his research.

One month a year he is a senior doctor in internal medicine and he also serves as a physician in the IDF Reserves.

But Adar says, “It is very inspiring to be at MGH, to see a center of this magnitude with this great orientation toward research, while keeping a focus on patient care. “

MGH offers opportunities unavailable in Israel, he says. “Consider the volume and variety of patients here, the world-class facilities, researchers and clinicians as well as the hospital’s ties to Harvard University Medical School and Harvard’s School of Public Health.” There are also educational opportunities available all over the Boston area, rich with universities and medical centers, which Adar frequents when he can.

“People come from all over the world to work, study and present research here.”

What does he hope to take back with him to Israel?

- Clinical and personal experiences: “I hope that when I return to Israel I will be able to provide better, more up-to-date care for patients. I also hope to learn skills here that I cannot learn anywhere else.”
- Research: “I hope to return after having experienced and learned about research performed here at MGH and Harvard Medical School, improving my methodology.”
- Life-long learning: “I have met wonderful people here, highly professional. And my mentor is great. I look forward to life-long connections with them.”

American Physicians Fellowship for Medicine in Israel

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