



American Healthcare Professionals and Friends for Medicine in Israel

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The ear houses the smallest bones in the body. Imagine operating on those of a child, under a microscope, in that tiny complicated space.

Dr. Yehuda Schwarz, soon-to-be an APF 2016-2017 Clinical Fellow in pediatric ear, nose and throat (ENT) and head and neck surgery at Montreal Children's Hospital, loves the precision work of pediatric ENT surgery and loves working with kids. He is now a general ENT and head and neck surgeon. After his Fellowship he will have earned the right to call himself a true pediatric specialist.

"I like the ear a lot and I've done a lot of research on it. (In fact, right now he's completing a two-year-Montreal Children's research fellowship investigating, among other areas, newborn hearing tests.)

"This surgery is very delicate and very complicated. And I like that."

The 42-year-old South Africa native also has a special view of his patients. "I adore working with kids. I don't mind the crying and I love their innocence," he says. "They're smart, and they say what they think. You have to get to them in a meaningful way, you really can't play around.

"It's important that you don't think of kids as 'small adults.'

"They have their specific diseases and children think and understand in different ways. You have to get down to their level, approach them in different ways than you'd approach an adult."

Schwarz made Aliya as a child in 1984. His mother is Israeli.

He and his family: wife, Inbal, a neonatology nurse who is working in Canada as a teacher's aide; sons

Yehonathan, 9; Hillel, 7; Tamar, 4 and Eithan, 2 come from the Israeli community of Gush Etzion.

Schwarz's father is a vascular surgeon and he "grew up around medicine," so there was no particular time at which he decided to become a doctor. "There was medicine 'in the house' the whole time. It was all around. So it was natural for me to carry on with it."

He attended medical school at Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center in Jerusalem and went onto an internship at Shaare Zedek Medical Center, also in Jerusalem, and then an ENT residency there as well. "Shaare Zedek is a wonderful place, it is very family-like. And I had the privilege of learning from very talented and devoted physicians such as Dr. Jean-Yves Sichel, head of the hospital's ENT department; Dr. Pierre Attal, head of pediatric ENT and Dr. Ariel Perez, head of otology."

How did Schwarz choose ENT surgery? "During my internship I didn't know exactly what I wanted. But I thought I would like to work with my hands ... in surgery. I also knew I wanted something that was precise, like surgery has to be.

"Initially I didn't know exactly what ENT was, but I knew I wanted something more specific than general surgery. And I knew that I wanted to do the 'small and delicate' surgeries.

"In the 'small' surgeries there are not a lot of options – plastics, eyes, ENT. I decided to try ENT and enjoyed it very much. During my internship I even elected extra ENT time, so when it was time for my residency I was already committed to the field.

"I think choice also has to do with your mentality, more of the certain type of person you are. And my personality is just more suited to the work of an

ENT surgeon. I can't say that I wouldn't have enjoyed other surgery fields or something else, but I just felt ENT was more for me.

"There are a lot of subjects in ENT – the nose, the head and neck, the ears, hearing and more. It's like a different little world. Everything is complicated and interesting and beautiful in its own way.

"And it's not just the specialty, it's the people in it that go into a decision like this," he says. "It's the people you work with, how the ward works. When it becomes kind of like family to you, that's also important to your choice.

"So I guess making the decision amounts to liking both the people and the specialty."

At home Schwarz taught nursing students at Shaare Zedek and medical students at Hadassah. He plans to continue teaching on his return.

In addition to teaching and clinical work, Schwarz published 10 journal articles and has had two accepted from his Canadian work. He has also presented research abroad.

Why did Schwarz choose Montreal Children's Hospital for his Fellowship?

It's a world-renowned research and clinical healthcare center with world-famous people and state-of-the-art facilities, he said. Dr. Sam Daniel, head of the Pediatric ENT department and the McGill University Auditory Sciences Laboratory, is a world leader in his field, says Schwarz. "He is a highly regarded researcher and teacher whose work has been published in many journals.

"There are surgeons here who are genuinely the best in the world, who actually wrote the literature in their fields.

"And the new hospital, which opened in 2015, is 'the best of the best,' I can't complain."

Another of the areas in pediatric ENT that Schwarz favors is airway surgery, which is done far less in Israel. But it's one that Montreal Children's does a

lot, he says. "I very much like treating airway disorders and there is so much I can learn here."

A narrowed pediatric airway needing attention can be as small as a few millimeters.

"I would also love to carry on their wonderful multi-disciplinary approach to treating patients. All the specialists come to the bedside and the OR at the same time to examine, do tests and confer. A patient doesn't have to go from doctor, to testing, to waiting for an appointment for another doctor and so on with a variety of specialists. And then, after all that, no one really gets together with all the information and talks about it. There is too much waiting, too much anesthesia, too little communication and the like. It is not the best way to treat a child.

"For example, here when a child is aspirating (a state in which an individual is taking in gastric secretions, oropharyngeal secretions, solids, or fluids to the tracheobronchial passage), this is an airway problem that needs people from three specialties: ENT, gastroenterology and pulmonology. And they all show up at once! It makes things faster and is just better medical practice. This way the child gets the best treatment. It would be better for adults too.

"I don't know of a clinic in Israel that functions with the three specialties together like this. (And certainly no pediatric ENT research institute like this one exists.")

At Montreal Children's there's greater volume and diversity of patients than at Israeli hospitals. For example, the population of greater Montreal alone is about half the total population of Israel. And patients come from farther away than that – even from abroad.

"In Israel there are very few pediatric hospitals and only a few ENT's who work only in pediatrics. Mostly it's ENT's who do some work in pediatrics. Whereas at this hospital you see only children all day and that makes a big difference.

“I would like to take Israel in this direction.”

While he has enjoyed his research fellowship very much, Schwarz has really missed patient contact and surgical time. He’s looking forward to clinical time even though he knows his schedule will radically shift.

“I know my clinical work will be a lot less structured and a lot busier, more intense, than the research fellowship has been.

“We work five long days with nights and weekends on call. We start early in the morning and work until late in the day. I have clinic hours, but mostly I’ll be in surgery. Also, there’s on-call in the ER. Schwarz credits his wife with tremendous support of his efforts. (Their youngest son was a new-born when they began their Canadian “adventure.”)

The research schedule, which was more flexible, afforded the family more time together. “It’s been good for the family,” Schwarz says. “We’ve also met

a very warm and welcoming Jewish community in Cote Saint Luc where we live.”

And they’ve also done a great deal of traveling. “We’ve seen a lot of New England, Canada and Northern New York.

“We enjoy the snow. I’ve learned to ski at night and the children now ice skate.”

Schwarz has also been able to participate in various educational programs in North America, such as an airway course which took place at The Hospital For Sick Children (SickKids) in Toronto.

He says there’s a certain peacefulness to Canada, lacking in Israel. “In Israel life is much more stressful.”

Was it necessary to leave Israel to get this specialized training?

“Yes. There is excellent medicine in Israel, but there are always things to learn, especially in this field.”

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