



Physician Spotlight: Dr. Michael Muszynski

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By JEFF WEBB



ORLANDO - When Michael Muszynski was born with a congenital heart defect in 1952, doctors told his mother they did not expect him to live more than two years. When he made it well past that age, they reconsidered their previous prognosis and predicted he might make it to his teenage years.

“By the time I was a teenager, they had more information and understood the condition (complete heart block) more,” said Muszynski. “Then they said ‘He’ll live a long time and die from something else. Maybe he’ll need a pacemaker,’ which back then was brand new and as big as your head,” he remembered.

In the interim, Muszynski enjoyed an active life, physically and mentally. “I could do anything any other kid could do, I just couldn’t do it as long. I could run, for example, but I couldn’t run a mile. ... So, I became a smarty pants,” he said. “If you looked in the dictionary for the definition of ‘nerd,’ you’d see a picture of me. I actually enjoyed reading, studying and learning just about anything they threw my way,” said Muszynski, who went on to play trombone in the marching band and “win just about every graduation award the school gave out.” By the time he earned his undergraduate degree in biology (with honors) at Youngstown State University, the young man with the delicate heart also had been certified a “century cyclist” who biked 100 miles a day on numerous occasions, and was on his way to medical school at Ohio State University.

The ability to exceed expectations would appear to be a lifelong pattern for Muszynski, whose 25-year career as a pediatric infectious disease physician now seems supplanted by his multiple titles and responsibilities with the Florida State University College of Medicine: Orlando Regional Campus Dean, Associate Dean for Clinical Research, and Professor of Clinical Sciences.

Muszynski was the first dean of the FSU Orlando campus, which is one of six regional campuses in FSU’s distinctive medical school model, where third- and fourth-year students are dispatched from the main campus in Tallahassee to receive concentrated training in clinical settings throughout the state.

Muszynski is responsible for directing the clinical education program for students assigned to the Orlando campus, where there typically are about 40 students assigned. “I have a supervisory and leadership role, not just the day-to-day crunching, but looking at what we’re going to do next, how we’re going to get better, how we are going to solve problems, stuff like that,” he said.

Muszynski also is responsible for the administration and development of research in clinical settings, including the statewide FSU Clinical Research Network and its collaborative affiliations. “That’s a lot of work. But if we hit the next three grants we have in the pipeline, I’m going to be so busy handling (\$10-12 million), I’m not going to be able to be that other dean guy. I see this position splitting into two eventually,” he suggested. The research job might have some appeal because “it goes full circle back to my background in research,” he added.

“I had a pretty exciting laboratory career as a young researcher. I developed a microbiology agar plate medium for special processing of sputum cultures used in hospital laboratories across the world. It’s called called OFPBL. I formulated it in 1984 and clinical application began in 1987. It remains in use to this day,” he said.

That was when he was completing his fellowship at what now is named Children’s Hospital of Oklahoma, and just before he accepted a position at Orlando Health.

“I never even thought of Florida as a fun place to live — until I got here, of course,” he recalled. “I had other options,” he said, but ultimately it was the appeal of being “the first pediatric infectious disease specialist to set foot in central Florida, build a research and residency training program from scratch, and get in on the ground floor of Arnold Palmer Children’s Hospital. It seemed like the sky was the limit.”

Accompanying him on that adventure was his wife Jane and their two very young sons. Muszynski met Jane when he was completing his internship and residency at Columbus Children’s Hospital (now Nationwide Children’s Hospital) in Columbus, Ohio. Jane was a registered nurse. “Here I was, this whippersnapper of an intern, and the first time I asked her out, she said ‘I don’t date doctors!’ I said ‘We’ll see.’” Muszynski laughed. “But I won her over by just being really nice. ... We dated for a year

and then got married. It was a whirlwind romance, but here we are 35 years later!”

After their sons made it to middle school, Jane got her advanced nursing degree and worked as a pediatric nurse practitioner in two private practices. Now she is a full-time Professor at Seminole State College School of Nursing. Their oldest son Michael is a professional orchestral bassoonist in Atlanta, and his brother Matthew controls satellites from an astrophysics laboratory in Colorado.

When Muszynski is not in his work routine, he is working in his kitchen. “I cook. Everything I can try. I cook almost every night for my wife. It’s actually relaxing and every night is like a new experiment in the lab of my kitchen. We rarely go out for dinner because she says only the highest-end restaurants can top me. I don’t think that is true, but I’ll take it,” he said.

“I am primarily self-taught, but had great mentors in my mother and my aunts,” one of whom was a caterer, he said. Muszynski also said he learned very early from his dad, a steel worker in Youngstown whose workplace collar evolved from blue to white, that “it was OK for a guy to be in the kitchen.”

Sadly, his father died from pancreatic cancer at age 51, when Muszynski was just 12 years old. “It was a defining point in my life. It was a dark time from which I had to emerge,” he said. “Not appreciating it when I was young, the event shaped my resiliency to survive any situation. My father was a giant in my mind of what it meant to be a good man, to be determined toward one’s goal, to constantly want to learn and understand, and to do good deeds.”

Muszynski said he was “fortunate to have the strong support from four uncles who, in essence, became my father surrogates. I am the product of my father’s, mother’s and uncles’ upbringing. Each stood as my hero in different attributes. I was fortunate to have such a strong, caring and responsive family.”

As Muszynski has so many times, he probably exceeded their expectations.

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