Feeling lucky — and cancer free

Jim Perrin had a persistent hoarse voice, and it just wasn’t getting better. It didn’t feel like a regular sore throat from a cold or overuse. “I knew it was something different. I just knew there was something going on that I needed looked at,” he recalls.

Perrin went to see his physician, who referred him to an otolaryngologist in nearby Brainerd, Minnesota. The news wasn’t good. After a biopsy of his throat, Perrin learned that he had cancer of the larynx.

First, the otolaryngologist tried eliminating the cancer with radiation, but that was unsuccessful. Perrin needed to decide whether to see a specialist in St. Cloud, at the Mayo Clinic, or the University of Minnesota. Perrin chose the University, having strong ties as an alumnus and former Twin Citian whose grandfather and other relatives also graduated from the U.

“It’s a very complicated surgery and it affects your swallowing,” Perrin says. “In order to get good attention I had to go down to the Twin Cities.”

In 2005, Perrin had his laryngectomy at the University of Minnesota Medical Center. About a year later he had another procedure to insert his tracheoesophageal voice prosthesis, a silicon medical device that helps him speak. Perrin is thrilled to report that he has been cancer-free for eleven years.

When Bevan Yueh, MD, joined the Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery faculty in 2007, he took over treatment for Perrin. Over the years, Yueh has completed numerous follow-up exams to check Perrin for a recurrence of cancer. He also regularly helps Perrin with swallowing issues stemming from his laryngectomy.

About once a year or more, Perrin travels from his home in northern Minnesota to the U. Yueh eases Perrin’s swallowing troubles by dilating his esophagus. Perrin tried seeking treatment closer to home, but quickly realized he needed the expert specialty care offered by Yueh and the University of Minnesota.

Perrin appreciates Yueh’s thorough exams, as well as the many humorous conversations they’ve enjoyed over the years. For a time, Perrin drove to the Twin Cities every six months for follow-ups. And he’d joke with Yueh saying, “Will I get another six months and 3,000 miles?” And Dr. Yueh would say, ‘Well, how about 5,000 miles?’ And when I graduated to once a year he’d tell me that I’d get a year and another 10,000 miles,” Perrin says. “We’ve always had fun, and it helps both of us.”

Continued on page 2
Dennis Porto, MD: Solo doc

Dennis Porto, MD, is a rare breed these days—a general ear, nose, and throat physician who runs his own practice. It’s the perfect setting for him, and one he has enjoyed since he opened for business in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1988.

Fresh off of his residency in otolaryngology, head and neck surgery at the University of Minnesota, Porto opened his private practice to treat patients ages zero to 100. To this day he relishes being an independent physician and caring for his patients’ diverse needs. Most days Porto spends his mornings doing surgeries and his afternoons seeing patients with all manner of ear, nose, and throat conditions.

“It’s one of the things I liked about the field in the first place,” Porto says. “I don’t specialize in one area—I try to do the broad range of ear, nose, and throat.”

That means treating people who are contending with everything from cancer and trauma to sinus troubles and ear diseases. Porto also does cosmetic procedures like rhinoplasty and otoplasty, and he helps patients with hearing loss, speech and voice conditions, and airway difficulties.

Over the years he considered joining a larger practice group as the health care environment evolved, but Porto has always opted to stay independent. He simply likes being a solo practitioner and plans to stay in private practice until he retires.

Being independent has its challenges, but overall Porto finds great fulfillment in his work. “It’s pretty gratifying to build a practice because it’s something I have done on my own. It’s satisfying knowing that patients refer other patients to you,” he says. “There aren’t that many of us in private practice. That in itself is a challenge, but it’s still really possible these days.”

Porto credits his residency at the University of Minnesota with giving him the comprehensive skills necessary to be an independent doctor. He benefited from work experience at four different hospital settings and learning from some of the best practitioners of the day, including NIH-funded researchers and those who literally wrote the textbooks on otolaryngology.

Porto himself contributed to early research in cochlear implants and earned a master’s degree in inner ear pathology from the University. But one of the most essential pieces of his residency, he says, was being exposed to the U’s patient-centered approach to care and emphasis on career-long learning.

“I learned by example how patient care was always the number-one priority—doing what is best for the patient and doing it the safest way and with the least amount of complications and side effects,” Porto says.

He continues taking these approaches to this day, including learning new techniques. Some of the most rewarding parts of Porto’s job are making a difference in patients’ lives.

“One of the best things I like about this field is we usually see patients get better quickly,” he adds. “You can help patients hear better in a matter of minutes and see them cured of cancer in a couple months. Often we have healthy patients who are having temporary problems, and we can get them back to normal.”

Outside of work, Porto spends time with his family, including three adult children, playing tennis, sailing, and fly fishing. Being near the water is one thing he misses most about living in the Twin Cities.

SNAPSHOT

Medication: Creighton University School of Medicine, Omaha, NE
Residency: University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN - 1988 Grad
Solo Clinic practice: West Des Moines, IA
Awards: Patient’s Choice Award; Compassionate Doctor Recognition; Top 10 Doctor in the State; AAO-HNS Fellow

James A. Donaldson: In Memoriam (1930 - 2016)

James A. Donaldson died peacefully Sunday, March 20 in Redmond, WA, surrounded by family. He was a renowned ear surgeon and professor who loved his family, his work and living in the Pacific Northwest.

Born January 22, 1930 in St. Cloud, MN, Jim attended Shattuck Military Academy, MIT, University of Minnesota and University of Minnesota Medical School. He graduated in 1960 from his residency at the University of Minnesota Medical School. He had an otology fellowship at the Otologic Medical Group in Los Angeles and then became a faculty member at the University of Iowa. In 1965 he was appointed to chair the newly created Dept. of Otolaryngology at the University of Washington. Jim received many national and international awards in recognition of his contributions to the field of otolaryngology.

He is survived by his wife of more than 65 years - Marilyn, five children, thirteen grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.
SUMMER in Uruguay as a child, Lyford-Pike, a native of Brazil who also lived in the United States when she was 10, giving her the ability to speak Portuguese, Spanish, and English like a native speaker. She completed medical school and residency in otolaryngology, head and neck surgery at Johns Hopkins University. Lyford-Pike came to Minnesota for fellowship training in facial plastic and reconstructive surgery with the U’s Peter Hilger, MD. She will be double board-certified in otolaryngology, head and neck surgery and facial plastic and reconstructive surgery.

Lyford-Pike was eager to stay at the University of Minnesota because of the opportunity to have an extremely diverse practice, do research, and help teach future doctors. In addition to her facial paralysis work, she does pediatric facial plastic surgery, reconstruction for adults after cancer or trauma, and plastic surgery on the neck and face, including rhinoplasty.

Adults who had surgery to remove tumors from their skin, throat, mouth, or glands often will be cured of cancer but endure significant deformities. Lyford-Pike helps reconstruct their faces so they can lead normal, healthy lives. For kids, she is part of the complex cranio-facial clinic, helping patients with reconstruction of birth or acquired concerns and paralysis.

“She also is continuing her research to keep advancing her field—a major career goal. Lyford-Pike already partnered with U of M professors in computer science and psychology to build a 3-D model of the face. They are creating a virtual mirror, similar to an avatar, to provide patients with visual feedback as they work on retraining their facial muscles.”

Sarah Barsness knows well the challenges confronting health care and medicine, having spent the bulk of her career working for two disease-oriented nonprofits. As the health care field tackles changes in its delivery and business, it needs guidance and support from an experienced team.

So when a position opened at the University of Minnesota Foundation to champion the Medical School, Barsness was eager to land the job. She joined the team as a development officer this spring, and her work will consist of engaging and encouraging philanthropic support from all Medical School resident alumni, including the Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery.

“I’m very passionate about the challenges facing the medical community, from the rise of health care costs to the increase in chronic diseases,” Barsness says. “This is a chance for me to raise dollars for young professionals who are going to be facing challenges unlike their predecessors have ever known.”

 Barsness comes to the University from the National Kidney Foundation, where she worked for eight years as a project manager and then executive director. She also worked at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and Minnesota Public Radio in sales and special event fundraising for eight years total.

Thanks to her mother, a nurse, Barsness got engaged early in health care issues and grew very comfortable with people working in the field. She further developed her interest in medicine thanks to her nonprofit fundraising and advocacy work.

Some of Barsness’ responsibilities include connecting with department alumni and supporters, and other medical school and resident alumni from the University of Minnesota. She is excited to expose them to the depth and breadth of work occurring on campus and show off all that the medical school does, including educating future doctors, conducting research, providing medical care to people of all ages, and more.

She will connect alumni and supporters in any way they would like. They are welcome to attend lectures, sit in on classes, meet fellow alumni or faculty, or share their own knowledge with the medical school community.

“It’s really about welcoming our alumni and friends to the table and encouraging them to be a part of the University and its community,” Barsness notes. “For the graduate physicians, it’s an opportunity to give back and provide knowledge to the upcoming generation. They also have an opportunity to connect with peers and learn what’s happening in their field from each other.”

On top of sharing her enthusiasm for health and medicine, Barsness thrives from meeting people, learning their stories, and discovering how they got interested in otolaryngology or other specialties. She loves having conversations about what inspired physicians, learning about their successes, and hearing about the changes they experience in the medicine.

The mother of two young children, Barsness spends her free time enjoying reading, craft beer, the theater, and relaxing at the cabin.
Mark Your Calendar

Monday, September 19, 2016
Boies Alumni Reception
Sally’s Seafood on the Water
San Diego, CA

November 11-12, 2016
SUO/OPDO/AADO Combined Meeting
Grand Hyatt Denver
Denver, CO

December 1, 2016
Boies Annual Lectureship
PWB 8-335
5:30 PM

Friday, January 27, 2017
John Young Annual Lectureship
PWB 8-335
5:30 PM

Saturday, January 28, 2017
Minnesota Academy of Otolaryngology
MAO Midwinter CME Conference
Windows on Minnesota/Marquette Hotel

March 30 - April 1, 2017
Midwest Head & Neck Cancer Consortium
Minneapolis, MN
The Commons Hotel

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UMN Department of Otolaryngology