

Guest Lecturer: Todd Albert

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The University of Pennsylvania Department of Orthopaedic Surgery had the great privilege of welcoming Dr. Todd J. Albert as a guest lecturer to Grand Rounds this past February. Currently serving as the Surgeon-in-Chief at the renowned Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS) in New York City since 2014, Dr. Albert needs no formal introduction as many if not all are familiar with his tremendous contributions to the academic Orthopaedic world. Dr. Albert graduated from the University of Virginia School of Medicine and completed his residency in Orthopaedic Surgery at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, where he would sometime later serve as Chairman of the Department of Orthopaedics and President of the Rothman Institute, before accepting his current position at HSS. He completed his fellowship in spinal surgery at the Minnesota Spine Center and currently specializes in disorders of the cervical spine.

Dr. Albert has a particular interest in cervical spinal deformity conditions such as ankylosing spondylitis, kyphosis, herniated discs, scoliosis, spinal cord injuries, and post-operative spinal infections. Over the course of his career, Dr. Albert has written about 300 papers, seven books, and forty book chapters. His research has been overwhelmingly funded by both the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Research, awarding him the opportunity to be a co-primary investigator in the National Spine Patient Outcomes Research Trial. He also serves on the boards of several Spine related scholarly journals and as a leader for several Research Spine societies. His research has been presented and acknowledged on both a national and international scale. It is therefore no surprise that he was awarded the Arthritis Foundation's Charley Award for his contributions to orthopaedics.



Dr. Albert presented two lectures during Grand Rounds. The first was titled *Measuring Value: How to Deal with the New Healthcare Paradigm: High Value Orthopaedic Care at HSS*. His lecture described the challenge of current health care systems and providers in the United States to provide the best quality care at a reasonable value, an issue that has been very relevant given recent political events. He pointed out that the United States is, in fact, not the best at achieving this goal despite spending more of its GDP towards health care than any other country in the world. Dr. Albert noticeably caught the audience's attention by sharing that musculoskeletal complaints are the largest drivers of both direct and indirect health care costs in the country, i.e. orthopaedic surgeons are by no means innocent bystanders.



HSS has long served as a leader institution for Orthopaedic Surgery on all fronts. Dr. Albert characterized HSS as constantly striving to “reach the above”, which includes providing the best quality care in the most cost efficient way to their primary focus: their patients. He went on to describe the infrastructure and algorithms that HSS has installed in order to achieve the latter, giving interesting examples of pathways that have already been implemented.

Dr. Albert humbly acknowledged that being at HSS has its certain advantages that other academic centers do not share. Their institution has a unique patient population and is entirely devoted to musculoskeletal care; therefore its practitioners and providers of all subspecialties and trades are well versed in caring for patients for orthopaedic issues.

His talk sparked constructive conversation with regards to the very real challenges that other institutions, including Penn, face in providing the same level of care that HSS strives to deliver, and how to go about tackling those challenges in a concrete way. Perhaps the most memorable line from his lecture was about the tendency of academic centers to constantly desire expansion, stating for patients “Bigger is not better...better is better”.

His second lecture entitled *Cervical Deformity: Principles and Treatments* focused on how he first became interested

in cervical spine pathology, with a particular emphasis on the importance of respecting the life-altering complications that can occur after cervical spine surgery.

He also defined the mechanics and anatomy of the cervical spine, which must be clearly understood before a deformity can be defined. He noted that the “the conus of economy” or the ability to maintain an upright posture and a horizontal gaze needed to perform day to day activities, varies from patient to patient and is critical to understanding and treating cervical spine deformities. Deformities depend on a host of factors, he mentioned, all of which must be acknowledged in order to provide the correct treatment for the certain patient. Finally, he went on to show pictorial demonstrations of his own remarkable challenges and success stories of treating patients who had previously had significant, incapacitating deformities.

Dr. Albert concluded his visit by offering his invaluable knowledge and time to the residents in the Human Tissue Lab, teaching approaches and methods for cervical spine ACDF and PSE. The University of Pennsylvania Department of Orthopedics was honored to have Dr. Todd J. Albert as a visiting professor on February 23, 2017.

