

Meet Gerard Isenberg, MD, MBA

2022 – 2023 AMCNO President



TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR PRACTICE

I was born in Chicago, but I grew up all over the world, from the Philippines to Israel. My family settled in California, where I went to high school, and although I sometimes think of myself as a Californian, I am actually a Clevelander. I have now spent most of my life here, having moved from sunny San Diego to Cleveland to start my training after residency. Of course, I was surprised to find out that, yes, you can surf Lake Erie! I am a gastroenterologist, with interests ranging from general GI conditions to advanced therapeutic endoscopy, small bowel capsule endoscopy, deep small bowel enteroscopy, and artificial intelligence. I have a tertiary and quaternary care referral practice that draws patients locally, regionally, and nationally. My practice goals are to provide state-of-the-art expertise and superior quality care in gastrointestinal diseases in a collaborative and interdisciplinary fashion. As part of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center, I have spent 25 years teaching medical students, residents, fellows, and advanced endoscopy fellows. And, as Chief Medical Quality Officer for the University Hospitals Digestive Health Institute, I also spend time improving the quality of care my colleagues and I deliver through quality improvement projects, quality reviews, and continued evidence-based updates to the practice of endoscopy and medicine performed in our system.

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN MEDICINE?

My father was a physician, so, naturally, I was exposed to medicine at a very early age. While we were living in the Philippines, I saw disparate health care disparities as a young boy, but at the time, I did not realize how much that affected health care outcomes for people until much later. Nevertheless, the suffering I observed from people living in squalid conditions with preventable diseases made an impression on me. Sometimes, I would read my father's medical journals, and my curiosity was stoked by details of treatments for various conditions. Medicine seemed to me a career in which I would never get bored. And that is still true. There are always new questions that arise in the care of patients, and we continuously strive to find answers.

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

First and foremost, I am most proud of my wife and three sons. They are my "raison d'être." Second, I am proud of the numerous medical students and physicians I have trained over the years. To see them blossom into outstanding, talented clinicians with the skills and

knowledge that my colleagues and I have instilled is extremely rewarding. And, third, I am proud of my colleagues—they keep reminding me of commitment to excellence they embody.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES AND INTERESTS?

My hobbies and interests have evolved over time—from surfing, carpentry, and helicopter flying to traveling around the country and world, running, and playing with my Labrador Retriever. I have always loved to read, but I have moved from science fiction to non-fiction history. And, of course, I love to spend time with family and friends when the call of medicine ebbs.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE AMCNO THIS YEAR?

My overriding goal is to ensure AMCNO meets its mission "to support physicians in being strong advocates for all patients and promote the practice of the highest quality of medicine" while helping our members navigate day-to-day challenges and identify opportunities to enhance their practice and professional satisfaction. With the newly formed Future Leaders Council (you will hear more about this soon), we will be providing opportunities for medical students, residents, and fellows to become intimately involved in health care advocacy, legislation, networking, and community outreach. We will be more engaged in community health projects. We will continue our strong physician and patient advocacy through legislation in Columbus. We will be focusing on improving our diversity of leadership and voices within AMCNO leadership. We will be expanding our footprint in representing physicians and patients throughout Northeast Ohio as well as providing for increased scholarship money for medical students to partially offset the extraordinary debt that medical students incur with student loans. And, finally, we will be busy planning now for our 200th anniversary celebration in 2024 (look for more information about this as well!).

WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE?

We know many significant changes will be occurring in the health care industry throughout the next several years, if not months. Health care leaders will be adjusting their strategies to focus on investments, collaborations, and efficiencies that foster resilience in the ongoing storm of continued uncertainty. Health care players, including the White House, Congress, state lawmakers, insurers, industry groups, and patient advocates, will continue to

parry, feint, and thrust, which will likely result in additional policy changes. Physicians and patients will need to anticipate the changes as they come. Beyond health reform, additional risks and uncertainties are moving to center stage, as the health care industry is being forced to act, including on issues involving cybersecurity threats (more than 40 million patient records were compromised in 2021); electronic health record problems (copy and paste has led to medical errors and litigation, communication between systems remains poor); reimbursement changes; natural disasters (including the ongoing specter of the COVID-19 pandemic); medical misinformation; pharmacy benefit management consolidation; price transparency (including surprise billing); patient experience; physician burnout; telehealth utilization and reimbursement; artificial intelligence and big data; the opioid crisis; and ongoing health care disparities.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PHYSICIANS ABOUT SUPPORTING THE AMCNO?

Given the aforementioned important issues facing the medical profession today, I believe all physicians in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio should join the AMCNO and become active participants. As one of the oldest physician societies in the country, the AMCNO is the leading advocate of physicians and their patients since 1824! From legislative efforts that affect physicians and patients to community health projects, the AMCNO has been and remains at the forefront of medicine. You will undoubtedly find something in the AMCNO that resonates with your personal and career interests—whether it is legislative issues impacting your practice, member discounts, educational opportunities, practice management problems and solutions, networking with other physicians at our social events, or serving your community to improve health care here in Northeast Ohio. We want to hear your voice to help us see fresh possibilities for this year, and the next 200 years! ■

AMCNO Past President Dr. Matthew Levy Named St. Vincent Charity's 2022 Doctor of the Year



St. Vincent Charity Medical Center recently announced their 2022 Doctor of the Year: Matthew Levy, MD.

In addition to being past president of the Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio (AMCNO), Dr. Levy continues his membership as he has for many years and serves on several committees within our organization as well as the Academy of Medicine of Education Foundation (AMEF) Board of Trustees.

He is an orthopedic surgeon and the president of the St. Vincent Charity's medical staff. In the article about Dr. Levy's achievement, it states that "he is appreciated for his kindness, understanding, caring and exceptional skills as a surgeon by his patients, fellow physicians and staff" and that he "goes above and beyond" both professionally and personally. And, "he continues to be an asset to St. Vincent Charity, but more importantly, he is a good human being to all those who know him." We couldn't agree more.

Our sincerest congratulations to Dr. Levy on this outstanding recognition!

A Passion Turns into a Mission

AMCNO member and OB/GYN physician Mary Frances Haerr, MD, likes to say she's not "retiring," she's "re-focusing."

On March 30, Dr. Haerr closed her gynecology practice after 33 years, with plans to travel to Guyana in South America in May. By doing so, she will continue her decade-long work with JUSTWONDOOR (pronounced "just one door"), a 501c3 nonprofit organization that is committed to enhancing sustainable obstetrics and gynecology education in low-resource areas, both here at home and abroad, to reduce maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality rates. Dr. Haerr said the name comes from the commitment that "all women have the right to the same quality of health care, regardless of the door they walk through."



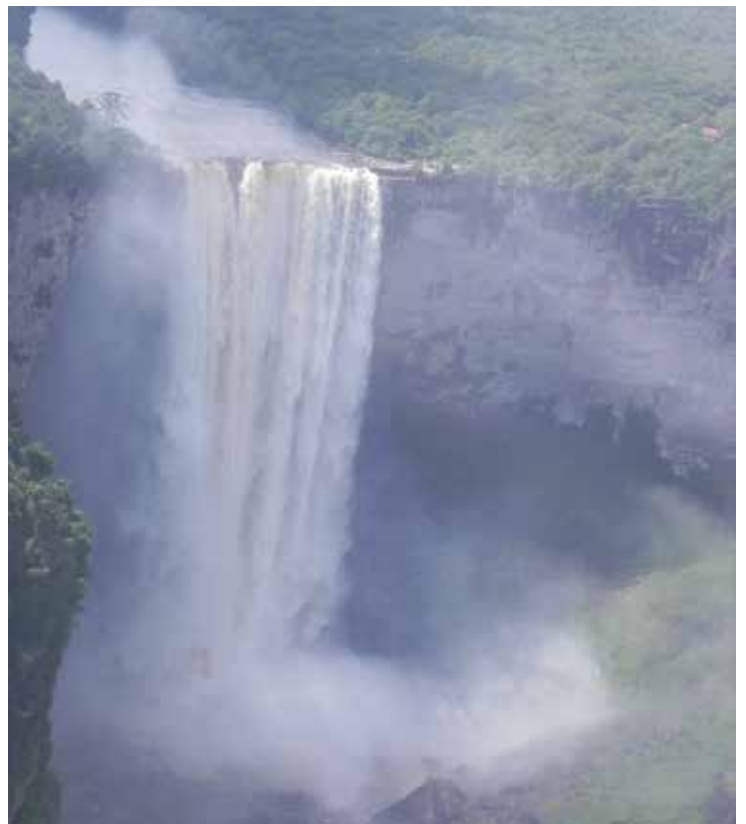
Visiting international faculty teaching Guyanese resident hysterectomy technique.

In 2010, Dr. Haerr met colleague Dr. Margaret Larkins-Pettigrew, who had previous volunteer experience in Guyana—which, at that time, had the second-highest maternal mortality rate in the western hemisphere (after Haiti). Maternal deaths could not be attributed simply to lack of access to care, with its presence of hospitals, reasonable roads, and midwives. Guyana also has a medical school, but there was no Obstetrician/Gynecologist specialty education of physicians prior to 10 years ago, with only two OB/GYN physicians in the country. Through a collaboration between University Hospitals (UH) and Guyana, an OB/GYN residency—modeled after current U.S. residency programs—started in 2012. Teaching staff consists of volunteer OB/GYN physicians recruited from across the United States, who may stay 1 to 4 weeks.

An OB/GYN physician's role as a volunteer for JUSTWONDOOR includes presentation of a grand rounds for the department, teaching and assistance in labor and delivery, on the ante-and post-partum wards, assisting in OB/GYN surgeries and teaching rounds in the gynecology ward. Faculty has also worked with the residents in creating evidence-based protocols with consideration of local resources to improve outcomes. OB/GYN residents may also rotate for a 4-week elective with similar responsibilities.

When Dr. Haerr travels to Guyana in May at the end of the academic year, she and Dr. Larkins-Pettigrew will be giving final oral boards to all the residents during a one-week period, based on the residents' patient case list collected throughout the previous 6 months.

Also in May, this program will be celebrating its 10th anniversary. During this time, the number of OB/GYNs, now specialty trained, has increased to 24 practicing across the country. JUSTWONDOOR also incorporates the development of leadership skills in the program.



An aerial view of Kaieteur Falls, the world's tallest single-drop waterfall.



Morning teaching rounds with residents and medical students, reviewing post-op and other non-surgical hospitalized patients in the gynecology ward.

Graduates from the first class in 2016 are now serving as the in-country residency director, another as the assistant residency director and a member of the Medical Council of Guyana, and another as the Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health. Mortality rates fluctuate (most in the last year are attributed to COVID-19), but in the last 10 years, the rate, as noted in the Lancet Global Burden of

Disease 2015 study, decreased up to 50%. Dr. Haerr is proud that this program has helped contribute to that, quoting, "If you save a mother, you save a country."

Dr. Haerr has been to Guyana 12 times since the program began. She plans to travel more, now that she has closed her solo practice, hoping to make another trip to Guyana later this year for continued support. A new Global Women's Health Fellow has been hired for the next two years, with a goal of creating a laparoscopy program. Guyana, which means "land of many waters," with its extensive rain forest, is a beautiful and growing country, Dr. Haerr said. It is also a draw that it is only a 5½-hour flight from JFK International Airport and is English speaking. She added that the sights do not disappoint. Although it's difficult to get to the interior because of its dense rain forest, she highly recommends a small-plane ride to see the tallest single-drop waterfall in the world, Kaieteur Falls.

For those who would like to learn more about the Guyana residency, JUSTWONDOOR's Global Health Scholars Program (for which Dr. Haerr creates the curriculum, culminating in a certificate in global health) or to get involved, visit the nonprofit's website, justwondoor.org, or contact Dr. Haerr at mfhaerr@ameritech.net. ■

IS IT TIME TO EXAMINE



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