
Memorial of Elizabeth Szalay's Academic Accomplishments
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Thank you. My name is Bob Schenck, and I was asked by Ken to speak on Elizabeth Szalay's academic accomplishments. I am honored to do so.

Elizabeth's life work in Orthopaedics, I believe, actually began with her upbringing as a native New Mexican. She graduated from Los Alamos High School, class of 1970, an experience that gave her a special understanding of the needs and disparities of our very unique and beautiful state. This, I believe, was Elizabeth's initial training as a caring physician. Elizabeth is a true New Mexico shining star with both undergraduate and medical degrees at UNM. Colleagues, fellow students, and co-residents here today will remember her intellect, humor, and work ethic.

Elizabeth's residency was at a premier "hands on" Orthopaedic Surgery program in San Antonio, Texas with many thought leaders including David Green, Charles Rockwood, and Kaye Wilkins from 1979-1983. Elizabeth excelled in an extremely busy and resident independent program that was truly in a male dominated world. I believe this was a big driver in her later phenomenal mentoring of women having trained with mentors who were also excellent, but only having the XY chromosome. Jim Heckman fondly remembered Elizabeth rotating in San Antonio and being able to tell her she matched in San Antonio when by chance Elizabeth happened to be eating at Paesanos, an old school Italian restaurant, where the selection committee was meeting.

Elizabeth cemented her love of children's Orthopaedics and research at Texas Scottish Rite Hospital, and she took her first *real* Orthopaedic job at Vanderbilt University in Nashville with Neil Green. One of her Vandy residents, Chip Routt, remembers her high expectations of the Vanderbilt orthopaedic surgery residents and he recently told me of one story, I describe as Clover Bottom Clinic. This children's clinic cared for kids with the severest deformities who were without care until Elizabeth's arrival. Elizabeth's dedication to the underserved at the Clover Bottom Clinic is what many of us hope for in an Orthopaedic career and Elizabeth continued this in New Mexico, and internationally in Ecuador and India. As Charlie Johnston from Texas Scottish Rite Hospital notes, her

love of caring for those who can't get care really defined Elizabeth. For this exemplary work for the underserved, Elizabeth received the 2015 Humanitarian award from POSNA, the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America. She personally received the award this past fall and will again be formally honored this May, 2015, in Atlanta at the POSNA annual meeting.

New Mexico was lucky when two acquaintances from 7th grade reconnected at their 30th high school reunion and thereafter, Elizabeth Szalay and Ken Gilman were married. We received a great wedding present with Elizabeth's arrival at UNM in 2002, and she became, in my mind, a thought leader and academician extraordinaire here at UNM Orthopaedics. Elizabeth was division chief of pediatric orthopaedics with us at UNM and was the first female orthopaedic surgeon to receive full professorship with tenure at UNMHSC in 2007. Elizabeth loved publishing and cranked out 13 excellent peer reviewed papers from 2006 to 2012. Her expertise included two related topics: bone health in children and expertise in reading DXA scans. These two topics were fertile areas for publication working at Carrie Tingley Children's Hospital here in New Mexico. Elizabeth collaborated with Susan Root and received \$58,000 from the Children's Miracle Network to create the Carrie Tingley Pediatric Bone Health Program, the only available bone health program for children in New Mexico. Since 2006, Elizabeth published approximately 30 manuscripts, two-thirds on the topic of bone density and DXA scans. But one of my favorite contributions that Elizabeth gave was on cultural competence that I will detail shortly.

It is often said you can never go home, but Elizabeth was lucky to do so. Her landmark paper in 2009 discussed a wonderful example of cultural competence that a Native New Mexican or Westerner would easily understand. This paper looked at the club foot, a condition of children that is most often treated with cast or bracing. Elizabeth and her co-authors compared rural and urban children receiving a brace. It especially focused on the Navajo patient. Elizabeth taught us to culturally understand how to teach, especially the Native American. There were many important findings, but one I believe is quite remarkable: Rural Navajo patients, Elizabeth explained, are influenced by the spoken word and as doctors must give positive teachings when speaking to Navajo caregivers.

Their paper went on to explain that negative images in Navajo beliefs are felt to bring bad luck, such as, “If you don’t wear the brace, your child’s foot will be crooked and may need surgery.” Positive teaching, Elizabeth explained, is a better approach with Navajo families, hence rephrasing the teaching to, “If you wear the brace your child’s foot will be straight.” Elizabeth was able to come home to New Mexico, use her knowledge of our culture and give us this landmark paper whose first author was not Elizabeth Szalay, but her mentored medical student, Frank Avalucea.

When Elizabeth became ill, she told Jude to give away her books, and told many of us similar feelings. But Elizabeth, like everyone in this church, believed in healing and gratefully, she made the decision to work and live. After this, Elizabeth went back to Jude and asked, “Who gave away my books?” During this two-year period she published 10 papers, saw patients, did surgeries, read DEXA scans, taught medical students and residents but, most importantly, mentored and loved the many Orthopaedic surgery residents and colleagues in our region and nationwide. Her mentoring and friendships are what really set apart Elizabeth’s career.

In closing, I would like to say one word . . . “BALANCE.” . . . Elizabeth’s academic career is powerful, but many successful Orthopaedic careers sacrifice everything else for what Elizabeth accomplished. Elizabeth’s home life, her loving relationship with Ken and her family are uncommon in such careers. Elizabeth’s interests outside of work, art and music to name two, in combination with her powerful spirituality, allowed her academic career to skyrocket. This life balance made her career even more spectacular.

My condolences to Ken, Elizabeth’s loving stepchildren and family, and all of her loving friends and colleagues. Elizabeth’s memory will remain a powerful mentor.

Humbly submitted,
Bob Schenck