



2022 Dedication: G. Russell Huffman, MD, MPH

Sachin Gupta, MD and David Glaser, MD



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“What we do is very difficult, not for the faint of heart.” Dr. Huffman was and will always be cherished as a gem of our institution. It is with the utmost honor that we humbly dedicate this year’s edition of the University of Pennsylvania’s Orthopaedic Journal to Dr. G. Russell Huffman MD, MPH, former Director of the Shoulder and Elbow Fellowship Program and Associate Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Dr. Huffman’s interest in orthopaedics began early on at Duke Medical School where he sought out world renowned mentors including Dr. Urbanik who was chair of the department at the time. He recalls being so impressed with what a gentleman Dr. Urbanik was, ranging from the extraordinary care with which he treated his patients to his profound clinical expertise. He knew that orthopaedics was the right field for him based on the ability to directly impact the quality of life for patients of almost any background. In addition, Dr. Huffman found it fascinating one could operate from “anywhere in the body from the spine to the ankle or foot.” At the end of the day, like most of us, he found it to be one of the most fulfilling specialties and one in which the residents and attendings had the best personalities. Dr. Huffman recalls, “I originally wanted to save patients’ lives, and found that in orthopaedics, rather than save lives I could profoundly improve the quality of lives. Needless to say, of all the specialties, those colleagues in orthopaedics were the most fun to work with.”

Contrary to what one might believe, medicine was not always the end-goal. Dr. Huffman, in college, began his studies in political science and at first had thoughts about enrolling in law school. However, his grandfather, great grandfather, uncle, and cousins were all physicians and had a tremendous influence on him. Spending a summer in Africa, he found that this was a field in which he could really impact people in a tangible way. While thoughts of entering the ministry intrigued Dr. Huffman, it was really medicine where he felt he could make a difference.

It was January 3, 2005 when we were lucky enough to court Dr. Huffman away from UCSF where he had completed his residency. Dr. Huffman found that Penn had opportunities to teach young orthopaedic surgeons and

participate in groundbreaking research; it was one of the most comprehensive job opportunities that he had encountered. After meeting with Dr. Sennett who had recently established the sports center at Weightman Hall at the time, and Dr. Glaser, who met with him at the local favorite White Dog Café, Dr. Huffman knew that this was the right fit for him. What he most cherished about Penn was the people. “It’s easy to fall in love with a place because of the support and quality people who work at Penn.” He really enjoyed taking time to get to know the residents. “They would read and publish articles, ask questions, and constantly challenge me.” In addition, he enjoyed getting to know the fellows and developing relationships with his future colleagues as they worked closely with him. Dr. Huffman recalls Dr. Levin being tremendously supportive, seeing him as family rather than an employee. He states, “the biggest thing I’m going to miss is the people. There’s something special about working at Penn and especially training residents and fellows. It’s a mentorship model which you don’t get at a lot of places.”

Dr. Huffman was our fellowship director for the shoulder/elbow division for 12 years. Throughout his tenure, he was both nationally and internationally recognized as an expert in the field of shoulder and elbow surgery. Dr. Glaser describes him as “one of the most creative surgeons you’ve ever seen.” The creativity and complexity of his elbow cases that he tackled were unparalleled, garnering the respect of other shoulder and elbow specialists worldwide. He often received referrals from many well-respected surgeons given his ability to take on such difficult cases. He trained 12 fellows, all of whom have developed into accomplished surgeons with several starting their own fellowship programs.

Dr. Huffman’s dedication to his fellows did not go unnoticed. Several of his prior fellows shared their praises of Dr. Huffman with us.

- Mohit Gilotra, MD (Associate Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, University of Maryland Medical Center, Baltimore, Maryland): “Although I learned about surgical techniques in the lateral position for capsular release and labrums etc, what I learned most about was how to teach in the OR: how to have high demands on perfect technique but still keep a collegial nurturing atmosphere. Harder to do than it sounds.”
- Christy Piper, MD (Signature Orthopaedics, St. Louis, Missouri): “Dr. Huffman’s humility and dedication to his patients are just a few of his attributes that I strive to emulate in my own practice. He is always available to discuss difficult cases or offer sage words of advice. I feel so privileged to have spent fellowship year learning from him, and to now call him my friend and mentor.”

- Venkat Seshadri MD (Premier Orthopaedic and Hand Center, Flossmoor, Illinois): “I’m proud to have had Russ and Dave as mentors and friends. I remember my fellowship year at Penn as one of the best years of my life personally and professionally.”
- Chad Myeroff, MD (Twin Cities Shoulder and Elbow, Minneapolis, MD): “Dr. Huffman is a masterful clinical narrator, but I learned even more from his actions than his words: always honoring his duty to give each patient the benefit of the doubt and calling on creativity and sound principles to solve each unique problem for each unique patient, always available, and always with a smile.”

Furthermore, Dr. Huffman was able to circumvent many challenges especially during COVID-19, which was undoubtedly frustrating especially for attendings and trainees alike. Nevertheless, he persevered and sought ways to improve the fellowship. “COVID-19 made us creative about how we presented ourselves; we were able to put together videos from past fellows and do a better job showcasing the

program than most fellowships in the country especially with such short notice.”

Despite having over 100 peer-reviewed publications, multiple NIH grants, and outstanding surgical prowess, Dr. Huffman describes his biggest accomplishment as being a father of four children. He feels he is still striving to discover the balance in his life between his busy, robust academic career and family life. In the coming years, he is eager to spend time with his father, who still resides in Orlando, Dr. Huffman’s hometown, taking walks and eating ice cream with all three family generations together. Meanwhile, he also looks forward to building high-quality specialized care in an untapped growing market in Florida and hopes one day to train international visiting surgeons in addition to creating a destination training location for Penn fellows. Humble, innovative, and caring, Dr. Huffman exemplifies what we all strive to be as orthopaedic surgeons and most importantly humans. It was truly an honor to work with him and he will be missed. Nevertheless, Dr. Huffman will always be part of the Penn family.