American College of Physicians: Arizona Chapter

Meet the Masters: a series of conversations

Masters comprise a small group of highly distinguished physicians, selected from among Fellows, who have achieved recognition in medicine by exhibiting preeminence in practice or medical research, holding positions of high honor, or making significant contributions to medical science or the art of medicine. Masters must be highly accomplished individuals. Evidence of their achievements can come from many types of endeavors, such as research, education, health care initiatives, volunteerism, and administrative positions. The Master must be distinguished by the excellence and significance of his or her contributions to the field of medicine.

Welcome to ACP-AZ’s Newest Master! Jorge L. Rakela, MD, MACP

Dr. Jorge L. Rakela is Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine and Professor of Medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona. He is an internist, gastroenterologist and a hepatologist. He studied medicine at the School of Medicine, University of Chile in Santiago, Chile. His training for internal medicine and gastroenterology was done at Hospital El Salvador, University of Chile, in Santiago, Chile. Subsequently, he continued his training at the Liver Unit, University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California under the mentorship of Drs. Telfer B. Reynolds and Allan G. Redeker.

After completing his postgraduate education, he became a faculty member of the Division of Hepatology at USC. Subsequently, he moved to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota where he became Professor of Medicine at the Mayo Clinic, College of Medicine. His research interest involves viral hepatitis with special focus on chronic viral hepatitis and autoimmune liver diseases. He has had his research funded by the NIH with special focus on the interaction between HCV and HIV, and the development of HCV quasispecies with recurrence of HCV infection after liver transplantation. He has published over 250 original peer-reviewed articles, authored over 30 chapters and he has given around 150 presentations locally, nationally and internationally.
From 1994 through 1999, Dr. Rakela worked at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center where he was Chief of the Division of Transplantation Medicine, Chief of the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, and Medical Director of the liver transplantation program. He moved to the Mayo Clinic Arizona in July 1999. Dr. Rakela was initially Chair of the Division of Transplantation Medicine at the Mayo Clinic Hospital, and was subsequently named Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine in 2002. He is active in the practice of general hepatology and transplant hepatology. Dr. Rakela was Co-Editor of *Liver Transplantation*, an official journal of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases, until December 2009 and served on the Governing Council for the International Liver Transplantation Society.

Dr. Rakela has actively participated in ACP chapter meetings in Minnesota, South Dakota and Arizona.

**ACP-AZ’s had the opportunity to interact with Dr. Rakela as follows:**

**ACP-AZ: How long have you been a member of the American College of Physicians?**

*I became a member of the American College of Physicians in 1979 and a fellow of the ACP in 1985.*

**ACP-AZ: Why did you originally decide to join the ACP and why have you remained a member throughout the years?**

*Although my daily practice is mainly general hepatology and transplant hepatology, I primarily consider myself an internist. My link to the College continues by attending and participating in regional College activities. I have also enjoyed the publications of the College, specifically the Annals of Internal Medicine and the New England Journal of Medicine, which provide me with excellent insight as to where internal medicine is going and the most salient innovations amongst different subspecialties. I have always worked in an academic medical center with a residency in internal medicine and subspecialty fellowships; the College provides excellent tools such as the MKSAP, that we can use not only as a way to keep up with internal medicine at large but also as an educational tool for our residents and fellows. The College has also been able to represent internal medicine and define what incorporates an internist, while providing a perspective that is a good balance between academic internists and those in private practice.*

**ACP-AZ: What are some of your proudest academic or professional achievements?**

*Every academic promotion from Instructor to becoming a Professor of Medicine has given me a sense of achievement. Some of my fondest memories are of my first paper being published, as well as my first RO1 funded. One of the proudest moments of my professional life is having been elected to the Mastership of the ACP.*

**ACP-AZ: Tell us more about your post as Co-Editor of Liver Transplantation.**

*Liver Transplantation and Hepatology are the official journals of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases. Dr. John Fung, Chair of the Department of Transplantation Surgery at the Cleveland Clinic, and I were chosen to be co-editors of Liver Transplantation on July 1, 2004*
for 5 years. It was a very rewarding experience to learn first hand the new contributions done by the top clinicians in the field of liver transplantation. This work not only kept me up to date with the literature, but also provided me with a certain degree of influence in the advancement of the field. During those years we saw the contributions from China grow significantly, the establishment of living donation as an option for adult liver transplantation, and the development of locoregional therapy in the management of hepatocellular carcinoma.

ACP-AZ: How do you maintain a healthy balance between work and the rest of your life?

I think that this is a work in progress. I love every aspect of my work: patient care, educational opportunities, clinical research, and, as of lately, administration as Chair of a Department of 150 physicians. My wife and children remind me when I am "overdoing" it. I have been blessed to have the support of my wife who does not hesitate to point out the importance of balancing work, family life, and our health.

ACP-AZ: What are some of the challenges that you think the current health care system is facing, on the state or local level?

With the passage of the new health care law, we will need to define what needs to be done to provide patient-centered high-value health care delivery practices. At the same time, we will need to do it more efficiently and at a lower cost. We need to be innovative in the field of health care delivery. We need to think "outside of the box" in order to incorporate millions of uninsured patients into the mainstream of American medicine during a time of limited resources. In addition, we must facilitate the future of medicine; we need to look into how the discoveries from The Human Genome Project will assist us in developing personalized medicine. On one hand, we need to expand health care to Americans who do not have reliable access to it, and we must also incorporate translational genomics into the practice of medicine. These are very challenging yet exciting times in medicine!

ACP-AZ: Dr. Rakela, thank you for taking the time to correspond with us!

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