

Mihran O. Tachdjian, MD: IPOS Founder and International Ambassador of Pediatric Orthopaedics

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For younger pediatric orthopaedists, orthopaedic residents and fellows, the International Pediatric Orthopaedic Symposium (IPOS) is an amazing gathering of those dedicated to the art of pediatric orthopaedics. Every December, passionate teachers and learners from all over the world gather in Orlando, Florida to exchange information in order to make care for children better. It would be fair to assume that this meeting was the brainchild of a past AAOS or POSNA subcommittee; yet its origins began with a humble Armenian Surgeon with a passion for education and a flare for international collaboration. More senior pediatric orthopaedists remember the “Tachdjian Course” as the forerunner to our current IPOS. Others may only be aware of the author, Mihran O. “Myke” Tachdjian, through the wonderful editions of his textbook which is now perpetuated and produced by the faculty at Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children’s.

The Tachdjian name floats through the subconscious history of our Society and our specialty, and because his professional background is foundational to our present, it’s important to have a feel for the man as well as his achievements. Because of Myke’s inexplicable ability to not only educate within the field but also impact so many lives on a personal level, he was able to develop many life-long relationships around the world which in turn fostered further growth in the field.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as orthopaedic surgery became more complex, subspecialties began to develop for uncommon conditions such as orthopaedic oncology, sports,

hand surgery, and pediatric orthopaedics.

Myke Tachdjian’s first textbook signaled the beginning of the defined specialty of pediatric orthopaedics and provided a comprehensive basis for managing complex pediatric musculoskeletal disorders.

The first edition, single-authored, was published in two volumes in 1971 and compre-

hensively identified the range of this new specialty. Previously, there had been some domestic and international pediatric orthopaedic texts published but nothing as encyclopedic as Myke’s two-volume textbook. His book defined the initial boundaries of what today’s pediatric orthopaedist does. Many would suggest that Myke Tachdjian should be considered the father of the subspecialty of pediatric orthopaedics as it is practiced today. There are those who would list Hiram Kite from Atlanta or William T. Green of Boston as fathers of our subspecialty. These and many other great physicians prior to Tachdjian’s era practiced, published, and taught management of pediatric orthopaedic disorders such as poliomyelitis, cerebral palsy, tuberculosis, clubfoot, developmental hip dysplasia, limb deficiencies, as well as other unique orthopaedic problems of children. A small group of these giants



Mihran O. Tachdjian, MD



Class photo of the first International Pediatric Orthopaedic Think Tank (IPOTT) meeting, 1996

limited their entire practice to the care of children, but prior to Myke's influence, most pediatric orthopaedic care was provided by general orthopaedic surgeons who treated adults and children on a daily basis.

If you were an orthopaedic resident in the 1970s, the ABOS required you to have considerable knowledge of pediatric orthopaedics to pass the examination. However, many orthopaedic residency programs had limited expertise in some areas required for board certification (orthopaedic oncology and orthotics/prosthetics). In order to meet accreditation requirements and supplement clinical experience and knowledge within the subspecialty, some residency programs sent their residents to additional away rotations. In 1972, Myke began an intensive two-week pediatric orthopaedic course that brought noted experts from around the world to speak about all aspects of pediatric orthopaedic diagnosis and management. Myke's course was an amazing endeavor averaging over 400 attendees who unanimously endured lectures from 7:00 am until 10:00 pm daily. Most attendees were focused on writing down the pearls of wisdom that would get them through their board exams. In addition to sending residents to the Pediatric Orthopaedic International Seminar (the Tachdjian Course), many residency programs also used Crawford's comprehensive didactic text and slide supported lecture series that was available at Myke's course.

Through Myke's global connections, his course was uniquely comprised of international faculty aware of the

most current management of bone disorders in children. Myke socio-politically was far ahead of his time exercising the tenets of equity, inclusivity, diversity, and anti-discrimination as a way of life. The camaraderie, friendships, and knowledge gained from participating in his courses was priceless. The relationships became family and as with most reunions, it could be competitive, and everyone brought their "best game" to the party. Many new therapeutic approaches to complex disorders such as the Wagner and Ilizarov methods of limb lengthening and reconstruction were first introduced in this course to audiences within the United States.

The course was lengthy and lasted well into the evening. For new faculty, there was often a trial period where the younger members were assigned lectures during evening sessions, while the established faculty enjoyed a lavish meal or entertainment. Many of these junior faculty eventually joined the ranks of senior faculty with annual invitations to participate, and it was always a confidence-builder when a junior person was reinvited as faculty. While a relief to be included in the following year's faculty, it was always anxiety provoking to accept. Myke would not finalize the program and topics until all faculty accepted. One would learn of their assignments when the published programs were mailed to every orthopaedic surgeon in the U.S. and Europe. Often a faculty member discovered that he/she was assigned to speak for 10 minutes on a subject they had never seen or heard of occurring. However, upon discussing the topic with Myke, he would promptly inform

the reluctant faculty member that a good place to begin was with his textbook and Myke would expect that faculty member to perform their own additional research on the topic. At that point, there was only the option of thanking him for his confidence, read his textbook, and seek cases and opinions from anyone who had seen such a case. Thus, new insights were gained, and education continued to rise.

For faculty of the Tachdjian Course, you could expect no honoraria for your participation. Your payment was the opportunity to link and learn with international colleagues before email, internet, and cell phones and educate focused and determined residents while tasting the good life. Myke was a forward thinking and dedicated educator, but as the ultimate connoisseur of all things tasty, he provided an unbelievable palate for serving on his faculty. Being invited to serve as faculty for his course was a pinnacle of recognition and acceptance among the growing number of pediatric orthopaedic colleagues at the time. This was also an opportunity to gather and promote the specialty to those who were still in training. The exposure of colleagues from around the world improved knowledge of pediatric orthopaedic care, created friendships, and accelerated the development of the subspecialty. This stimulation to internationalism had an enormous impact on pediatric orthopaedic surgery worldwide.

In his later years, he created the International Pediatric Orthopaedic Think Tank that still meets annually as a forum for discussing ideas and developing methods among leaders of academic pediatric orthopaedic programs. His sudden death occurred prior to the upcoming seminar that had already been planned for 1997. The faculty resolved to continue his work because of its importance to pediatric orthopaedic education, to international interchange, and to collegiality.

Between the courses and the book, there developed a growing awareness of the subspecialty of pediatric orthopaedics as it provided a method for aspiring orthopaedic surgeons to begin to understand the entire range and

scope of this emerging subspecialty. Without these fundamental resources, our education would have been insufficient. Many early pediatric orthopaedic surgeons practiced independently or were the only subspecialist in an academic teaching program. The Tachdjian Course and textbook provided a guide for all circumstances they faced, especially conditions that were uncommon and complex. In order to better appreciate him, we invited pediatric orthopaedic surgeons who spent several years as faculty on his pediatric orthopaedic seminar spanning 25 years to reflect upon their involvement and interactions with Myke who we feel was so important in the development of our subspecialty. The following comments are just a few we received. We thank Myke's great friends Tony Catterall, Carl Stanitski, and Norris Carroll for their similar reflections.



Left to right: Myke Tachdjian and his wife Vivian with Lynn Staheli and his wife Lana

Lynn Staheli, MD:

Myke's family was driven out of Armenia and settled in Lebanon where his father and other displaced Armenians founded a very successful carpet weaving business. He studied in Switzerland to become a concert pianist but later changed to medicine and ended up at Harvard. He was amazingly creative, focused, and wrote his pediatric orthopaedic textbook which exceeded anything previously written on the subject. He produced a symposium focused on pediatric orthopaedics with an international faculty from which would ultimately spin the IPOS and



Inaugural meeting of the Pediatric Orthopaedic Study Group and Pediatric Orthopaedic Society to form the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America.

IPOTT that continues. He moved from academia to a highly successful private practice furnished with a fashionable desk. This desk was reputed to be one of two, with the other belonging to the King of Saudi Arabia. He lived in a condominium on the 89th level of the John Hancock Building in Chicago. We were both invited to Adelaide Australia for a conference where he and his wife arrived on the same flight with matching Louis Vuitton luggage. In contrast, we arrived with backpacks.

Stuart Weinstein, MD:

I participated in Myke's course in the late 70s and early 80s. He was a larger-than-life-figure. I was early in my career and awed to be on the same program with such luminary pediatric greats such as George Lloyd Roberts of Great Ormond St. in London, George Mitchell of Edinburgh, Sir Dennis Patterson of Adelaide, Tony Catterall of London, Sherman Coleman, and many others. The program was an All-Star line-up of the world's "Who's Who" in pediatric orthopaedics. The amazing course organization by Myke's staff gave attendees a "state-of-the-art tasting menu" of the entire world of pediatric orthopaedics. I must admit that at the time I felt like a "Little Leaguer" being called up to the Majors. Myke was an unbelievably gracious host to the faculty. Over time, I got to know him well and served as co-visiting professor



Left to right: Myke Tachdjian, Bob Hensinger, Chief Ray Morrissy, and Stuart Weinstein as visiting professors at Atlanta Scottish Rite Hospital

with him on several occasions. His textbook, much of which was based on material from his earlier life at Boston Children's and his work with the legendary William T. Green, was the first major textbook in our specialty.

Ham Peterson, MD:

As an orthopaedic resident at Mayo Clinic, I rotated 6 months at Chicago Children's Memorial Hospital. Myke was an excellent leader, teacher, and writer, being the sole author of the first all-inclusive pediatric orthopaedic textbook. He was also a driving force of the first pediatric orthopaedic medical organization—the Pediatric Orthopaedic Society. He was outgoing with a larger-than-

life personality and a good friend to his colleagues—particularly to all the residents he trained. His annual meeting (Pediatric Orthopedic International Seminar), held alternatively in Chicago and San Francisco, was famous because of its quality, depth, wide range of international speakers, and the attendance of the many famous friends he acquired over the years. Myke was a superior classic pianist and a connoisseur of all things—particularly food, wine, and quality of life, believing in living life to the fullest.



Left to right: Alvin Crawford, Colin Moseley, Myke Tachdjian, Neil Green, Ken Kuo, and Bob Hensinger at IPOTT

Ken Kuo, MD:

I first met Mihran Tachdjian in 1972 when I was a senior resident at the University of Illinois and interested in pediatric orthopaedics. He suggested I go to the Hospital for Sick Children (now Great Ormond Street Hospital) in London and was kind enough to contact Mr. George Lloyd-Roberts on my behalf. Upon my return from London, I attended his course and later became one of the speakers. We became personal friends. I attended the first IPOTT meeting he organized in Aix-en-Provence, France. He was a good doctor and warm and considerate to his patients and their families. I inherited his practice after his passing and all his patients spoke very highly of him.

Dror Paley, MD:

In 1988, at age 32, I was the youngest member of the Tachdjian faculty, the “Who’s Who” of pediatric orthopaedics. Mihran recognized my potential at a time when I was swimming upstream as a trailblazer against the

tides of more conventional pediatric orthopaedics, having not yet earned the recognition that he gave me. In 1995, at age 39, he asked me to discreetly help him organize a special meeting in Chicago for top pediatric orthopaedic surgeons over the age of 40. Because of him, I became the youngest member of the newly formed IPOTT. I am forever indebted to Dr. Tachdjian for helping launch my pediatric orthopaedic career. He brought together the vanguards of orthopaedics from around the world. I was privileged to attend his funeral in the fellowship of his friends in December of 1996. I remember him as my friend, mentor, and promoter.

Terry Canale, MD:

Myke was a giant in pediatric orthopaedics way ahead of his time. His pediatric education course drew over 700 participants year after year in either San Francisco or Chicago. One year, he assembled a group of faculty in Aix-en-Provence, France, to write a new textbook on orthopaedic surgery in children in 1 week. As I remember, all expenses, including airfare for the week, were paid. I have a photo of him sitting by a hotel pool on the French Riviera smoking a huge cigar and drinking a large glass of expensive chardonnay—that was Myke! He loved orthopaedics and loved life.

Randall C. Morgan Jr., MD, MBA:

I had the privilege of serving as chief resident at Northwestern, and I was among the group of residents who worked to plan and implement the very first Tachdjian International Pediatric Orthopaedic Seminar. Our responsibility was to assist with contacting the many international guest speakers, picking them up at the airport, purchasing special wine gifts for them, and making sure that they got to the faculty dinner at Sayat Nova restaurant in time for the royal feast. No task was too great for Dr. Tachdjian when it came to planning and executing the Seminar because he had the full support of his residents and fellows (affectionately known as “the boys”) to ensure success. He saw no barriers due to color but rather only opportunities to serve the international patient community.

John Anthony “Tony” Herring, MD:

“Myke”

Larger than life

Feasting on life

Taking us all

On a journey through our craft.

The road

Was the craft

And he was the map maker

Telling us where we had been

And where we were going

Like none before.

The stops along the way were grand,

The food of life,

The dances of the soul,

The grand meals of diversion,

The great wines of friendship.

His maps covered the globe,

Marked not with cities

But with friends

Who had learned much

From the master storyteller.

What did we learn?

Ah, here’s what “cannot be replaced,”

For we learned of life and joy and being

And tasted briefly

The soul of this man

Of greatness.



Left to right: Myke Tachdjian, Giampalo Trevella, and Alvin Crawford