

David S. Lee, MD
MDS Mentorship Summary

Thanks to the generous support of the Medical Dermatology Society, I had the opportunity to rotate with my mentor Dr. Jonathan Cotliar at Northwestern University in November 2014. My time at Northwestern and Chicago was invaluable from both a professional and personal perspective. The goals of my mentorship experience were threefold: 1) To gain greater exposure to the rapidly growing disciplines of inpatient consultative dermatology and oncodermatology. 2) To participate in the provision of interdisciplinary care through their multidisciplinary clinics. 3) To establish a long-term mentoring relationship with Dr. Cotliar. Under the supervision of Dr. Cotliar and his colleagues, I attended a variety of outpatient subspecialty clinics, including the cancer skin care/ transplantation skin cancer clinic, cutaneous lymphoma clinic, and complex medical dermatology clinics.

I worked directly with Dr. Cotliar at his daily general/medical dermatology clinic and weekly combined cancer skin care/transplantation skin cancer clinic. There, I saw a number of cases of acute and chronic GVHD, reactions to chemotherapies, and skin cancers arising in the setting of transplantation-related immunosuppression. In between patients, Dr. Cotliar often provided brief teaching points on the conditions we encountered. Something I noticed right away was how well liked and respected he was among his patients and colleagues. Upon hearing that he was going to leave Northwestern, nearly every patient was saddened to hear the news and expressed their utmost gratitude to Dr. Cotliar. One patient even hand crafted a custom professional grade cutting board in his home woodshop as a going-away gift to him! Dr. Cotliar's amazing bedside manner, attention to patient concerns, and collegiality with ancillary staff reminded me that there is so much more to clinical care than making the right medical diagnosis and management decisions.

At the extremely busy Tuesday afternoon cutaneous lymphoma clinics, Drs. Joan Guitart and Timothy Kuzel (hematologist-oncologist) graciously allowed me to see patients with them. I saw a variety of cutaneous lymphomas, ranging from classic mycosis fungoides and its variants to Sézary syndrome, cutaneous B cell lymphomas, and primary cutaneous CD30+ lymphoproliferative disorders. Many of the patients at this clinic had presented as new consultations or referrals from the Midwest and beyond. It was exciting to see so many cases of cutaneous lymphoma and the variety of new treatment options available to patients, some of which I had only read about until that month.

I also partook in daily inpatient consult rounds at Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center and Northwestern Memorial Hospital, which were attended by Drs. Cotliar and Joaquin Brievea. We encountered a variety of cases throughout the month, ranging from drug eruptions to acute graft versus host disease to crusted scabies. One patient left a particularly strong impression on me - she was an elderly woman with Sézary syndrome refractory to multiple chemotherapy regimens. Her advanced disease rendered her ineligible for the any clinical trials at the time. I first saw her at the cutaneous lymphoma earlier that month, where she presented with erythroderma and numerous painful ulcerated plaques and tumors. In the following weeks, her functional status deteriorated so rapidly that she was admitted to Lurie Cancer Center for pain management. We followed her in-house during my final week at Northwestern, where she ultimately expired after a decision was made to pursue palliative care. This patient reminded me of how devastating conditions we encounter in dermatology can be as well as the impact we can have as clinicians and researchers within the greater field of medicine.

Throughout the month, Dr. Cotliar also offered a wealth of career advice ranging from job searching to contract negotiation, securing research funding, and finding a niche within dermatology. As it turns out, Dr. Cotliar has recently moved to a new position at City of Hope in Duarte, CA, which is a short drive from USC. I am excited to continue working with him in Los Angeles as I begin my career as a medical dermatologist later this year. For this, I am extremely grateful to the Medical Dermatology Society for allowing me to partake in this wonderful mentorship experience!