



Photography: Ray Reyes

Matt Perez, M.D. (right), is a clinical research fellow through Moffitt's Graduate Medical Education Program, chaired by Jonathan Zager, M.D. (left).

# PHYSICIAN- SCIENTISTS IN THE MAKING

## CLINICAL EDUCATION AT MOFFITT

By the time Matt Perez elected to do a clinical rotation at Moffitt as a fourth-year USF medical student, he was already familiar with several Moffitt physicians from working in their research labs. Now an M.D. halfway through his residency at Emory University in Atlanta, he's taking a two-year break – to come back to Moffitt as a clinical research fellow for Dr. Jonathan Zager in the Cutaneous Oncology Department.

"Being a Florida native," says Dr. Perez, "I knew the presence Moffitt has in the state and the amount of research that it's constantly performing. As a USF med student, it was such an opportunity to be able to come over here and participate. You want to be somewhere where the faculty is very accessible for mentorship and guidance."

Dr. Zager, a surgical oncologist who also chairs Moffitt's Graduate Medical Education program, was named Moffitt's Clinical Educator of the Year in 2015. He says the breadth of clinical education at Moffitt is surprising to many – "I'm

sure there are plenty of people who are not aware of all the different avenues provided here," starting with one-day observation experiences that are open to high school students considering a medical career.

Moffitt trains more medical students and physicians in the field of oncology than all other Florida institutions combined. More than 400 medical students rotate through Moffitt each year, with first- and second-year med students getting firsthand exposure to Moffitt's clinical services. "It's called DCE for Doctoring Clinical Experience," explains Dr. Zager. Moffitt physicians who volunteer for DCE, as does Dr. Zager, welcome these young physicians-in-training to follow them in clinic or even the operating room one day a week. Many will return as third- and fourth-year med students doing clinical rotations, as did Dr. Perez.

After medical school, the opportunities for clinical education at Moffitt become very competitive. Residents (newly graduated physicians who practice under the direct supervision of an

attending physician) and fellows (post-residency physicians seeking more training in a medical subspecialty like breast surgical oncology) fill 115 full-time equivalent positions on a monthly basis at Moffitt. While Dr. Zager says most residents are USF grads, Moffitt welcomes one or two visiting residents each month. "So, if you are doing your residency in another state but are interested in eventually pursuing a surgical oncology fellowship at Moffitt," Dr. Zager explains, "you might elect to come here during your fourth year of residency to do a one-month elective."

Moffitt offers 26 different fellowships, "and they are great programs," says Dr. Zager. While other institutions offer similar fellowships, "Moffitt is a huge cancer center, ranked number six in the nation. We have world-class faculty, and are extremely busy both clinically and academically. Our faculty and trainees are on the forefront of publishing on the latest techniques, the biggest case series and retrospective reviews. It's good for the trainees – and advantageous to Moffitt to offer these fellowships. Otherwise, we'll lose top-quality candidates to other centers."

Dr. Perez already has his eye on a possible return to Moffitt. Now working on clinical outcomes research with Dr. Zager, he'll go back to Atlanta to complete his residency before heading off to a fellowship. He wants to become a professor of surgical oncology – hopefully at Moffitt.

"No doubt, my experiences working with Moffitt faculty, as well as my experiences working with Moffitt researchers have solidified my thoughts on my career," says Dr. Perez. "My plan is to become a surgical oncologist, and I have an interest in skin cancer and soft tissue malignancies. In the last decade, there have been a lot of therapeutic breakthroughs, so it's a very exciting time to be participating in the care of these patients. And I want to continue to participate in research and teaching."

Another physician-scientist in the making, with help from Moffitt Cancer Center. ☺

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OF ONCOLOGY THAN  
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