

— Continued from page 69

challenging to the physician and patient. To control it is still a struggle, because diabetes really is not a single disease, it's a syndrome — a complex metabolic disorder — and it has serious consequences.”

Four years after entering private practice, Dr. Nagendran was recruited by Pfizer to serve as director of the company's Diabetes and Endocrinology Group. He had multiple roles at Pfizer, including being a director in a managed care medical group and becoming head of diabetes for the Regional Medical and Research Specialist team.

In these positions, and for a subsequent year in research and development at Novartis, Dr. Nagendran devoted himself to studying the value of drugs for patients with diabetes and hypertension or people at risk to develop these diseases. Many of the drugs he studies treat the complications of diabetes — lipid overproduction, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. At Novartis, for instance, he studied Galvus and Tekturna, novel drugs that target glucose and blood pressure.

After working at two pharmaceutical “behemoths,” Dr. Nagendran now enjoys the smaller environment at DS, where he studies the metabolism of new drugs such as its newly approved Welchol, which addresses high LDL cholesterol and blood glucose, two cardiovascular risk factors in patients with type 2 diabetes.

While drugs are still in clinical trials, he studies their efficacy and value. “A physician needs to know good business practices as well as patient needs and should be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of drugs,” he says. “We need to know how this specific drug applies to this specific patient, to know how much the patient understands about the drug, and how it fits into the whole armamentarium of drugs at a physician's disposal.

“I will always miss my patients,” he adds. “But I love working in the pharmaceutical industry, alongside some of the top minds in medicine and research. Here I have the ability to impact global health care.”

At work, Dr. Nagendran's time is spent solving challenging sections of a giant puzzle, but he prefers to leave puzzles behind when he goes home for the day. He says the best way to clear his mind and enjoy himself is by spending time with his wife, Christine, a native of Sri Lanka, whom he met in the United States, and their three young sons, Sanjay, Amrit, and Arjun: “After studying all day how a drug works, I want to relax with my family — no puzzles!” **M**

Yu-Ning Wong, MD '99

Adding Statistical Tools to the

During the coming year, Yu-Ning Wong, MD '99, will celebrate her tenth reunion at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. As an attending physician in the Department of Medical Oncology at Fox Chase Cancer Center, Dr. Wong treats patients who have a genitourinary cancer (prostate, kidney, bladder, or testicular). By any measure, her career is young, but her goals — to better understand cancer and cancer patients and to assess treatment outcomes — are shaped by the sort of maturity and insight one might expect from someone with decades more experience in the field.

Since 2004, the American Society of Clinical Oncology Cancer Foundation has awarded three grants to Dr. Wong, supporting her research. The most recent, announced in the spring of 2008, is a three-year, \$200,000 Career Development Award. The grant enabled her to establish an independent clinical cancer research program to further her studies of treatment outcomes. The award is presented to 13 physicians in their second, third, or fourth year as full-time faculty members in an academic setting.

One of Dr. Wong's recent projects focused on how cancer patients choose their treatment and how these decisions affect outcomes. Like all patients, those with cancer have many issues to weigh as they make decisions. The benefits of treatment must be balanced against medical and personal issues that differ for each patient. Expenses are increasingly problematic: the cost of therapy has skyrocketed as a result of scientific advances in cancer drugs, which now target tiny cell abnormalities rather than taking a “one size fits all” approach. Other factors in the equation include age, personal values, financial commitments, the health of a spouse, co-existing illnesses, individual co-pay arrangements, and access to care.

As a senior at the University of Virginia, Dr. Wong traveled to Singapore to assist in research on the structure and effectiveness of that nation's required medical savings accounts. Through her involvement with the project, she gained an early appreciation of how complicated health care policy can

By Kate O'Neill

Oncologist's Black Bag

be. She encountered a system in which citizens are required to take personal responsibility for saving up to pay for their own medical expenses, but they are also given the impossible challenge of predicting the unforeseeable costs of catastrophic illness. These issues continue as factors in her analysis of patients' treatment decisions.

In 1995, as a first-year medical student, Dr. Wong was still mainly interested in public policy and hoped to advance the field by expanding and applying her knowledge about global health care. Meanwhile, she kept an open mind about her choice of a specialty. For a time, during clinical rotations, she explored psychiatry. The experience she gained — at the University Medical Center at Princeton and at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York— stands her in good stead, she says, in counseling patients as they sort through their treatment options.

Not until Dr. Wong was completing a fourth-year oncology elective under Robert P. Fein, MD, clinical assistant professor of medicine, did she consider an internal medicine subspecialty. Several factors shaped her decision. "That was the year that Herceptin was approved as a treatment for breast cancer, and there was a lot of excitement in the field," she recalls. Medical oncology also attracted her, as a sub-specialty in which she would get to know her patients and develop a relationship over time.

Dr. Wong completed her residency in internal medicine at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia. Then, following a three-year fellowship in hematology and oncology at a joint program with Temple University and Fox Chase Cancer Center, she accepted an appointment to the Fox Chase medical staff in 2005. Learning of her interest in assessing treatment benefits, Paul F. Engstrom, MD, senior vice president for extramural research programs, selected Dr. Wong to receive funding through a National Cancer Institute-funded training grant that allowed her to complete a master's degree in science in clinical epidemiology at the

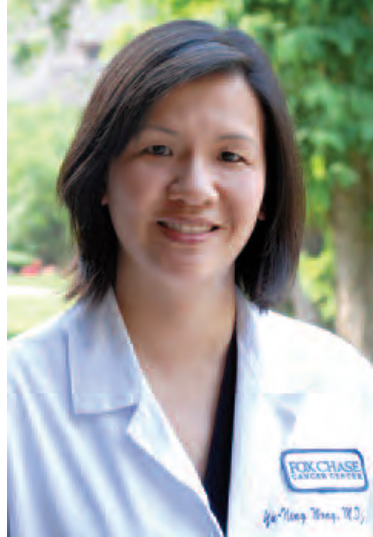


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"As part of my research life, I study national databases, consisting of tens of thousands of patients with prostate cancer," says Dr. Wong. "But as a physician, I focus on the person sitting across the desk from me, doing the best I can for each one and advocating for the most appropriate possible course of treatment."

University of Pennsylvania while working at Fox Chase. This master's program included courses in economics, statistics, and epidemiology. The skills she gained have equipped her to study and analyze the vast amount of information stored in national databases, identify patient populations, and determine the cost-effectiveness of cancer treatments.

Dr. Wong applies her post-graduate training in clinical epidemiology to the development of a reliable system of cost-assessment analysis for patients with prostate cancer. Using this knowledge, she is able to counsel her patients on their treatment options.

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"Dr. Wong has a work ethic beyond any I have seen," says Dr. Engstrom. "Insightful, innovative, and goal-minded, she is also a superb clinician. When I'm away, she takes care of my patients, and they love her. She takes the time to listen to them and stops to explain everything. We are delighted to have her on our staff." **M**