



Dr. T & Nishan Tchekmedyian

Translational Research through Generations

by Nishan Tchekmedyian

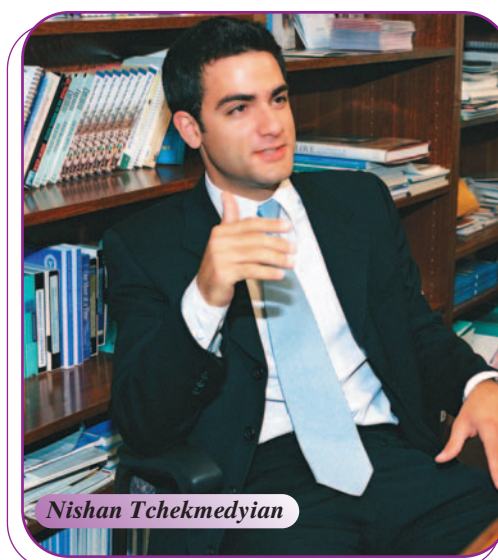
I got to know the hospital at an early age. On the days that I did not have school, mostly weekends, my dad would make me go to his office and do my school work. I often tagged along in the oncology ward, to everyone's dismay,

while he made rounds. The house staff was always friendly, and the nurses took care of me. I used to find the round adjustable doctor stools very interesting. Since the stools have wheels, I would propel myself from one side of the ward to the other, trying to avoid impact when possible. My favorite hospital gadget was the pressurized chute used to send things to different floors. Thankfully, the nurses kept me away from it.

Despite the chaos I occasionally caused at the hospital, I learned a lot there. From early on I saw the effects of cancer and how doctors take care of patients. I vividly remember peeking around a ward corner for about an hour, watching my dad explain to a family their loved one's condition. After seeing a lot of extremely sick people, cancer became a very human problem in my mind. Nurses at Pacific Shores Medical Group would often sing "Zipedee Doo Dah" for their patients as they finished a course of chemotherapy; some walked out cancer free.

In the last half of my high school years, I studied biology and I began to wonder more about the science of cancer, about what causes a cell to become cancerous at the molecular level. As usual, I was tagging along with my dad this time at a medical meeting when he introduced me to Dr. Dennis Slamon, who offered me to do more tagging along in his research laboratory. Later I learned that Dr. Slamon is a famous cancer researcher who brought the first molecularly targeted therapy, Herceptin, to breast cancer patients in the clinic. He has a huge lab at UCLA, where generations of students, from high school kids to post doctoral candidates, try to better understand the scientific process and the inner workings of cancer cells.

I have now been working at the lab for about three years and am about halfway finished with my undergraduate courses at UCLA. At the lab, I participate with my teachers in research with drugs and drug combinations, studying their effects on cancer cells. At the same time, doctors like my dad work in the clinic applying these new concepts and therapies to cancer patients. This is called "translational" research, taking basic scientific discoveries and translating them into better treatments, and ultimately, a cure.



Nishan Tchekmedyian

Where did 20 years go? by Simon Tchekmedyian, M.D.

I can hardly believe that our son Nishan, is now involved in cancer research and pursuing a career in medicine.

I met my wife Seta during my chief residency in New York in 1981 and we later moved to Maryland where I did my oncology training. By the time I started practice on the West Coast, we had a couple of toddlers. Nishan was the first one and he joined me for rounds since he was 2 years old. His brother Vatche followed, and they both became familiar with hospitals, patients, nurses, long hallways, and doctors in training.

In addition to everything else science, biology, medicine, and the mysteries of cancer cells were subjects we talked about

around the dinner table. At times we talked about new molecules, and how they can be used in the clinic. Unwittingly, we engaged in "translational" research: the application of laboratory research findings to the treatment of patients. Sometimes it all feels unreal. Recently I saw Nishan's name printed in the proceedings of a cancer meeting. I said to myself, "No kidding!"

The family kept growing so now we have 6 children. Many of my patients have seen our kids grow up from toddlers to young adults. We are all proud of them, and who knows? This new

generation may do something special!



Simon & Seta Tchekmedyian

Pacific Shores Medical Group: A Member of the UCLA Affiliated Translational Oncology Research Network

Much of our ability to provide our patients with the latest clinical trials and access to novel molecules with unique mechanisms of action is a function of our cooperation with major organizations and research networks nationally and internationally. Of great importance is our membership in the UCLA Affiliated Translational Oncology Research Network. Under Dr. Dennis Slamon and Dr. John Glaspy's leadership, this program enables us to offer our patients options that would otherwise not be available locally. We are very privileged to work with extraordinary physicians and scientists at UCLA including doctors Peter Rosen, Fairouz Kabbinavar, Charles Sawyers, Christos Emmanouilides, Mark Pegram, Ronald Paquette, Randolph Hecht, and so many others who devote enormous efforts to offer patients the latest treatment and research options.

Ongoing research and update conferences and team meetings allow for collegial support and very close and strong cooperation, which in turn results in better and more thoughtful options for our patients. We also benefit constantly from a plethora of new basic and clinical research information generated at the UCLA campus in Westwood. The whole purpose of this effort is to translate new scientific discoveries into better treatments. These activities add to the passion and enthusiasm that our doctors, our nurses, and our staff feel for our work.

We are thankful to the patients who participate in this effort as no advances would be possible without them. We must also thank the clinical and research nurses, clinical research coordinators and pharmacists who work in concert with the physicians to keep patients informed, comforted, and safe while helping them through their treatments.