

A Conversation With C. William Hanke, MD, MPH

Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCRP, Section Editor



Dr Hanke is program director for the ACGME-accredited Micrographic Surgery and Dermatologic Oncology (MSDO) Fellowship Training Program at Ascension St. Vincent Hos-

pital in Indianapolis, IN. He founded the training program in 2004 as well as the Mohs Surgery Fellowship Training Program at Indiana University. He was formerly professor of dermatology, professor of pathology and laboratory medicine, and professor of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis.

Dr Hanke has served as president of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD), the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (ASDS), the American College of Mohs Surgery (ACMS), and the International Society for Dermatologic Surgery (ISDS). He has received the highest award from each of the four organizations: The Gold Medal (AAD), The Samuel J. Stegman, MD Award for Distinguished Service (ASDS), The Frederic E. Mohs, MD Award for Career Achievement (ACMS), and The President's Gold Medal (ISDS). Dr Hanke has served on 22 boards of directors and has been president of the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care and six other medical organizations. He has made more than 400 contributions to the medical literature, including 103 book chapters and 29 books.

Q. Which medical figure in history would you want to have a drink with and why?

A. Several ancestors on my maternal side were early leaders in the upper Midwest. Gen Thomas Meagher was an orator and Irish immigrant who founded and led the Union Army Irish Brigade in the Civil War. Gen Meagher was appointed governor of the Montana Territory by Abraham Lincoln following the Civil War. He had a reputation as a drinker, so he would probably have welcomed an invitation for a drink with me. Another ancestor, Nickolai Perrot, was a French-Canadian explorer who ultimately became governor of the Northwest Territory, which is now Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

As for medical figures, Rear Admiral William M. Narva was an esteemed US Navy dermatologist who passed away in 2020 at age 92. Admiral Narva and his close friend Dr Stephen Katz, the director of National Institutes of Health/ National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, made house calls to the White House together in the 1980s to care for President Reagan. Admiral Narva served as attending physician to Congress from 1986 to 1990. He and his wife, Rose, were personal friends with Ronald and Nancy

Reagan, George and Barbara Bush, Sandra Day O'Connor, Gen Colin Powell, and many other dignitaries. In June 2018, I had the honor to meet with Admiral Narva and Rose Narva when I joined AAD Former Presidents Wilma Bergfeld and Lynn Drake for an unforgettable visit to the Narva's Los Angeles, CA, home. Even though we kept in touch via email and by phone before and after our meeting, I felt there was still so much to learn from him. Dermatology and military medicine have been diminished with Admiral Narva's passing. I wish I had known him earlier in life.

Q. What part of your work gives you the most pleasure?

A. Dermatology has never been "work" to me. I love my patients, staff members, fellows, residents and students, and the problem-solving nature of the specialty. I cannot wait to get to the office each day. Since 2004, I have directed the MSDO Fellowship Training Program at Ascension St. Vincent Hospital. I particularly enjoy training and developing the new generation of dermatologic surgeons. This experience allows me to keep up and give back at the same time.



Q. Are an understanding & appreciation of the humanities important in dermatology and why?

A. An esteemed dermatologist colleague and friend, Dr Walter B. Shelley, once told me that “you always have to read.” He never stopped writing, reading, and learning, even into his 90s. Walter passed away during my Academy presidency in 2009, and I departed from an AAD meeting to attend his wake in Ohio. I feel that I am still being mentored by this amazing dermatologist. To this day, I still read and maintain his energy level as much as possible.

Q. What is your greatest regret?

A. There are no regrets. I have been fortunate to have had a number of leadership positions that have allowed me to serve the specialty and grow in ways that I had not imagined. I am grateful to dermatology for giving me my life’s work. The choices I made introduced me to so many amazing dermatologists from all over the world.

Q. Who are your heroes/mentors and why?

A. There have been many mentors. None of us succeed in a vacuum. The faculty at the Cleveland Clinic (Drs Henry Roenigk, Jr, Wilma Bergfeld, Philip Bailin, James Taylor, Willard Steck) had a profound influence on me during my residency and fellowship. They were all leaders in dermatology, and I assumed that their high level of achievement was the norm. Their example and encouragement served me well during my academic positions at Indiana University and Ascension St. Vincent. Dr Perry Robins has always been a great supporter and friend.

Q. Which patient had the most effect on your work and why?

A. I removed a football-sized basal cell carcinoma from the shoulder of a 60-year-old man in the early 1980s. It was a very large Mohs surgery requiring split grafts for reconstruction. The patient thanked me for saving his life in his obituary in 2012. He also expressed gratitude to the lifeguard who had saved him from drowning as a child in Dixon, IL—the lifeguard was President Ronald R. Reagan.

Q. What is the best piece of advice you have received and from whom?

A. The power of an encouraging word or a compliment can be a great motivator that causes us to live up to expectations. My department chair at Indiana University, Dr Art Norins, told me that I had the ability to spend time on “the things that were important.” Former AAD President Clay Cockerill said that I would bring “the voice of reason” to the AAD Board. Dr Ed Krull, chair of dermatology at Henry Ford Health System, told me that I looked good in a suit, and I have been wearing a suit ever since.

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