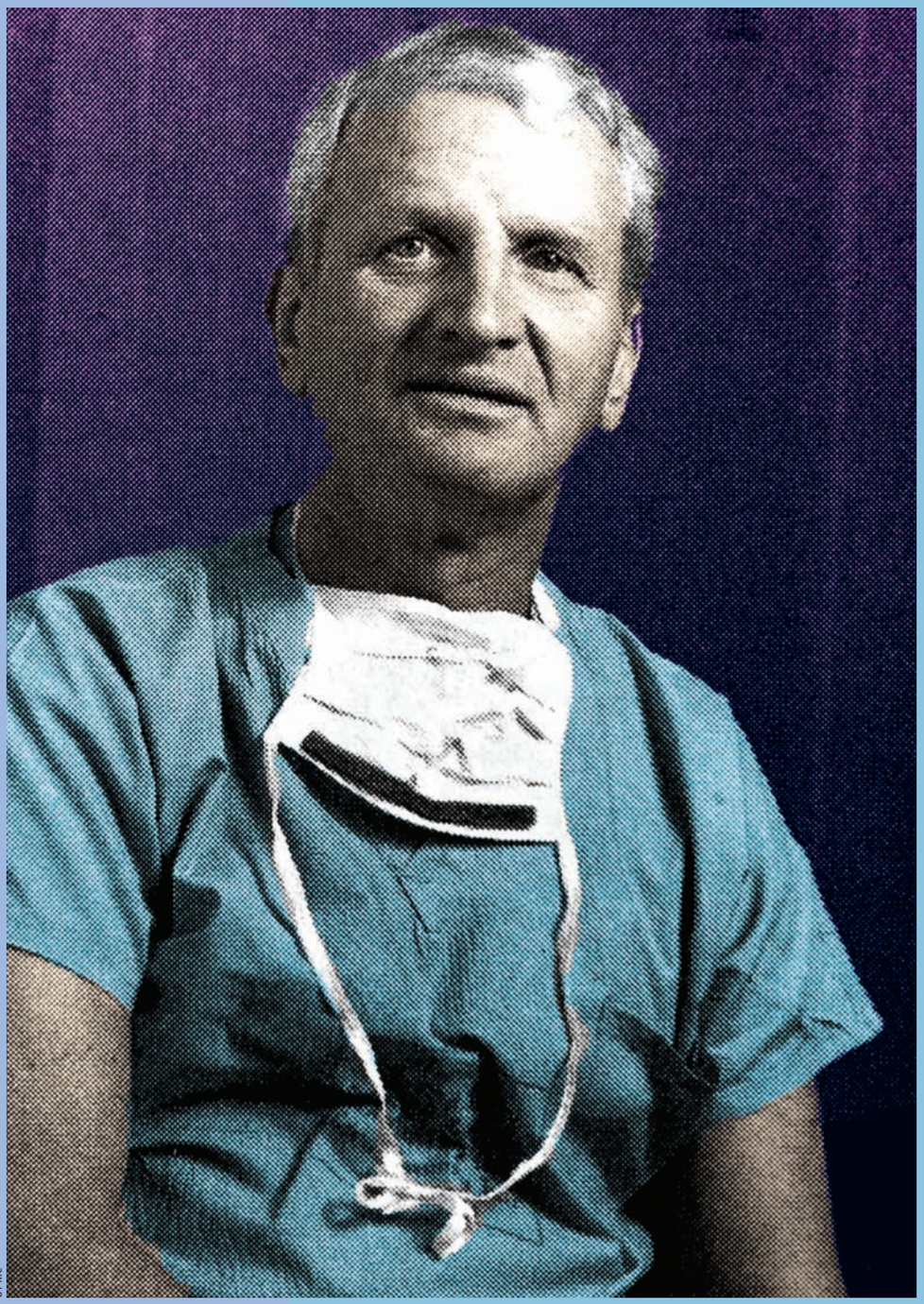


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Eugene Myers transformed Pitt's Department of Otolaryngology, and along the way, he trained 27 future department chairs, including his son.

THE CHAIRMAKER

EUGENE MYERS NURTURED A GENERATION OF OTOLARYNGOLOGISTS

BY GAVIN JENKINS

One evening in 1938, a man enters the South Philadelphia home of his primary care physician. The doctor's young son watches as the patient offers his father a jar of homemade spaghetti sauce.

By day, the father, David Myers, trains to be an otolaryngologist, but his preceptorship at Temple University Hospital doesn't pay enough to support his wife and two children. So he moonlights by running a private practice out of his family's living room. But it's the height of the Great Depression, and most of his patients can't afford to pay him. They often bring food in lieu of money to their appointments.

On this night, the patient, an Italian immigrant, hands over the jar of red sauce and says, "When I have money, I bring you."



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Eugene Myers, seen here with a patient, is a second-generation otolaryngologist. His son, Jeffrey Myers, followed in his footsteps, and Jeffrey Myers' son, Keith Myers, will graduate from Temple University's School of Medicine in spring 2021.

Eugene Myers, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Otolaryngology at the University of Pittsburgh and chair emeritus of the department, was the boy watching that night. He witnessed many interactions like this between his dad and his dad's patients during those hard times. When Eugene Myers tells the story, he'll add that his maternal grandfather, Samuel Nicholas, a physician with a successful private practice, gave his father money each week to help the family survive. Nicholas placed the cash in a fruit bowl, pinning it down with chocolate for his grandson and granddaughter.

Eugene Myers likes to share this story when he talks about his career. Why? Because it's an allegory for how his father—the son of Romanian immigrants who owned a tailor shop—was passionate about medicine and helping patients. And it shows that if you're a Myers, medicine is a family affair.

Jeffrey Myers (Res '96), who is the Alando J. Ballantyne Distinguished Chair of Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Some of Eugene Myers' protégés have trained otolaryngologists who have become department chairs, as well. "I consider them my grandchildren," Myers says, then smiles.

Eugene Myers, 87, could be called the Bill Walsh of otolaryngology because, like the legendary San Francisco 49ers's head coach, many of his protégés have borrowed his business style and leadership philosophy. Johan Fagan (Fel '97), chair of the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of Cape Town, says he molded his division after Pitt's.

Myers taught Fagan to build the careers of others by being generous with coauthorships. Also, he told him, surround yourself with the best possible people, regardless of whether or not their work outshines yours.

Godfather" because of his tremendous influence. Hao is now chair of the Department of Otolaryngology at Shin Kong Wu Ho-Su Memorial Hospital and program director of otolaryngology at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan.

During his fellowship, Hao spent a couple of hours each Saturday after teaching rounds with Myers in his office. At the time, Hao thought he was there to discuss the "poor" state of his manuscripts. But later, when he returned to Taiwan, he realized that Myers was mentoring him.

"He taught me everything" during those meetings, Hao says, including "professionalism, his philosophy."

The chair-tree Myers has grown almost didn't get planted. Despite looking up to a father, grandfather and three uncles who were physicians, he majored in economics at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

"That seemed like a miracle to me," Myers says of stapes mobilization. "And I wanted to be in the miracle business, not the business world."

In May 2021, when Eugene Myers' grandson, Keith Myers, graduates from Temple University's Lewis Katz School of Medicine, he will be a fifth-generation physician and the eighth doctor in his immediate family.

America has lots of families with multiple generations of doctors, but the Myers family stands out. They are royalty in the field of otolaryngology. The Myers family includes three department chairs of otolaryngology. And they ready others for that role.

It began when David Myers became chair of Temple University's Department of Otolaryngology in 1955 (he held the position until 1961). Eugene Myers followed in his footsteps; as the first full-time chair of Pitt's Department of Otolaryngology, he served for 33 years. Eugene Myers ushered the department into a modern era of head and neck surgery, and he cultivated an environment that emphasized academics.

Eugene Myers trained 27 otolaryngologists who have gone on to become department chairs around the world, including his son,

"Most importantly, he taught me to lead by example," Fagan says. "He was the hardest working person in the department when I was at Pitt."

An avid traveler who has been to 103 countries, Myers set out to improve head and neck surgery throughout the world. As chair, he recruited international fellows like Fagan, and then visited them once they returned to their home countries. Myers also built international relationships by serving on boards, attending conferences and lecturing at medical schools on nearly every continent.

Fagan shares that international approach. The University of Cape Town is the only university on the continent with an otolaryngology fellowship program, and many of Fagan's fellows have returned to practice head and neck surgery in their native sub-Saharan countries.

"He has changed the face of head and neck surgery in Africa by starting a fellowship program," Myers says proudly.

Sheng-Po Hao (Fel '93) calls Myers "the

He changed his career path after graduating when Samuel Rosen, a prominent New York otologist, visited Philadelphia to meet with his father. Rosen was there to talk about stapes mobilization, an operation that he had developed, which remobilizes the footplate of the middle-ear bone to relieve a conductive hearing impairment.

"That seemed like a miracle to me," Myers says of stapes mobilization. "And I wanted to be in the miracle business, not the business world."

Among Myers' most notable contributions to the treatment of cancer involved cases in which cancer cells infiltrated beyond the nodes in the lymph, or ECS (extracapsular spread). In 1979, the idea that ECS had a profoundly negative effect on the outcome of head and neck cancer patients was new to American otolaryngologists. Gordon Snow, professor and chair of otolaryngology at the Free University, Amsterdam, had found that using radiation therapy gave patients more control over the cancer in their neck. However,





BOTH PHOTOS: COURTESY MYERS

Eugene Myers has mentored otolaryngologists around the world, including Johan Fagan, department chair at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, and Sheng-Po Hao, director of otolaryngology at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan. LEFT: Jeffrey Myers, Eugene Myers, Marion Fagan, Johan Fagan and Barbara Myers pose at a black-tie event. RIGHT: Eugene Myers talks with Sheng-Po Hao.

many patients still died from distant metastasis. Eugene Myers added chemotherapy following surgery and radiation therapy, and his team found that the survival rate increased.

"When the drugs were refined, we went to a program of concomitant chemoradiation following the surgery and found that the cure rate was enhanced and the treatment time was reduced considerably," Eugene Myers says.

As this became the standard treatment for patients with ECS, Pitt's Department of Otolaryngology became internationally recognized. Eugene Myers served as president of all five major societies in the field, including the American Board of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. He is a diplomate of the American Board of Otolaryngology and Honorary Fellow of both the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and the Royal Society of Medicine in London.

On a cold morning, Myers sits in the small office he keeps at the Eye and Ear Institute. Framed honorary doctorates and lifetime achievement awards hang on the walls; the shelves are lined with books that his former students have written. Reflecting on how he became a chairmaker, Myers attributes his success to timing and management style.

Myers became chair of Pitt's Department of Otolaryngology in 1972, when Dean Donald Medearis had shifted the School of Medicine's focus toward the hiring of academic-minded faculty members. Before Myers, the department was staffed with private practitioners who worked with residents on a part-time basis.

"When I took over, the residents we attracted wanted to be involved in clinical otolaryngology," Myers says. "We had no reputation for anything else."

Myers hired research-minded experts to full-time appointments: academics like Charles Bluestone, a Distinguished Professor of Otolaryngology who specialized in pediatrics, and Jonas Johnson, a renowned head and neck cancer surgeon who succeeded Myers as the department's chair in 2005.

Myers followed a management by objective philosophy that he learned at Penn. He pushed faculty members to publish papers, and he led the charge, writing more than 300 articles and contributing to nearly 150 book chapters. However, he is best known for writing "Cancer of the Head and Neck," with coauthor James Suen, a Distinguished Professor of Otolaryngology at the University of Arkansas Medical School. The book is now in its fifth edition.

"That book became the Bible of the field," says Nancy Snyderman.

After her residency here, Snyderman (Res '83) was appointed to the faculty at the University of Arkansas. She thought she was on track to become chair—today, there are just five women chairs in American otolaryngology departments (including Cecelia Schmalbach, the David Myers Chair at Temple, which Myers and his wife, Barbara, endowed in his father's name). Yet a career in television got in Snyderman's way.

After doing a few spots on local news in Little Rock, Snyderman became a medical correspondent for NBC. She's arguably Myers' most well-known mentee. But when her television opportunities first began rolling in, she feared that being on television would hurt her academic career and about backlash from her colleagues in the medical profession. So, she called Myers.

"He told me to tune out the background noise and keep doing what I was doing. That's what I did and proceeded with my career," Snyderman says.

A lot of people would probably look at the Myers family legacy and assume that pressure is placed on some children to continue the doctoring tradition. But, just as Myers didn't urge Snyderman to stay in academics, family members say they didn't grow up feeling they were expected to become physicians. Though, Jeffrey Myers likes to joke otherwise, saying: "My parents said I could do whatever I want after medical school."

Instead of pressure, it's passion for medicine and caring for patients that's inspired the Myers family, according to Jeffrey Myers, who is Keith's father. And he thinks that's why Eugene Myers has trained so many future department chairs.

"My dad and grandfather worked long hours, but it was fun to them," Jeffrey Myers says. "My dad never complained . . . Rather, it was always, 'I met with this patient today, and she was really interesting. She had this fascinating condition that we helped her with.'" ■