



American Healthcare Professionals and Friends for Medicine in Israel

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Dr. Meir Mizrahi chose his profession at age 3.

"I was very close to my great-grandmother and when she died I remember clearly standing outside her house and thinking 'I will be the one who will find a cure for death when I grow up.' I was a very 'old' 3-year-old.

"When other kids said they wanted to become firefighters or policemen, I always said I wanted to become a doctor."

The 39-year-old Zichron-Yaakov (South of Haifa) native is a 2016-2017 APF Fellow in Advanced Endoscopy at Boston's Beth Israel/Deaconess Medical Center.

"Advanced endoscopy has radically changed medicine," he says. "With it we can have no holes, no scars and little pain. Most patients go home the same day with less or no loss of organ tissue."

Also, there are various cost-saving factors: patients return to work sooner, have fewer psychological repercussions and procedures don't require surgical suites.

An endoscope is a long fiber optic tube with a light source at its tip that can be passed through the mouth or the rectum into the gastrointestinal (G.I.) tract. The tip of the endoscope has a small video chip that transmits images of the G.I. tract to a television monitor so that the gastroenterologist can visualize the inside of the tract.

During advanced endoscopy the physician manipulates the gastrointestinal tract with instruments introduced through the endoscope. For example, for a patient with bile duct blockage, the gastroenterologist inserts a small tube called a stent into the bile duct to relieve the obstruction.

A number of advanced endoscopic procedures are now available, for example, for pancreatic, biliary and colon diseases. These include: removal of pancreatic duct stones, gall stones and colon polyps as well as cancer.

Mizrahi is a senior attending physician in gastroenterology at Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center. He came to the U.S. from Modi'in in 2015 as part of a family of seven including his wife Lilach, 45, a surgical nurse who works as a research assistant in the Beth Israel/Deaconess gastroenterology department. Their five children are: 16-year-old twins, daughter Noa and son Itai; 8-year-old son Michael; 5-year-old daughter Mika and 3-year-old daughter Manuel.

In 1998 Mizrahi, knowing no Italian, started medical school at The University of Florence, finishing at The University of Bologna. "It was very hard at the beginning. But now I speak fluent Italian and my children do too."

He completed his internship, residency and G.I. fellowship at Hadassah.

Initially Mizrahi thought he'd become a neurosurgeon. "I always wanted to work with my hands. But when I was actually exposed to neurosurgery during my internship I realized right away that it wasn't for me.

"However, during my internship I found I liked internal medicine very much. And I really liked the department of gastroenterology and the people in it.

"In internal medicine there are basically two subspecialties in which you work with your hands – cardiology and gastroenterology. My father passed away from cardiac problems and that might have pushed me away from that field.

"Also, my head of internal medicine at Hadassah, Professor Yaron Ilan, is a gastroenterologist and he influenced me a great deal. He was a mentor for me.

How did he get to advanced endoscopy?

"When you start your gastroenterology fellowship and you start doing procedures, you find out what you like and what you don't. I decided that advanced endoscopy would be the largest part of my professional work.

"I love the complexities of the diseases and the procedures; I consider it micro-surgery.

"And I like the idea of treating patients in this non-invasive manner, of seeing a rapid improvement in their lives, so much so that they can go home right away."

Before he left Israel, he was performing basic endoscopies and endoscopic ultra-sounds and learning more advanced procedures.

Mizrahi, who was on the faculty at Harvard Medical School last year, teaches medical students at Hadassah and has published 50 scientific articles, 14 from his time in the U.S. "And I expect at least another 10 more."

He has also presented research abroad more than 70 times.

Was it necessary to leave Israel for study?

"Yes, there is no training program in Israel for this sub-specialty.

"Here we see 10 times the number of patients than any hospital in Israel, including Hadassah. In six months in Boston I've seen what it would take five years to see in Israel. And the diversity is far greater.

"Also, in several areas, Israel is behind in techniques in this field."

Why choose Beth Israel/Deaconess?

Mizrahi had previously met the then-head of Beth Israel/Deaconess's advanced endoscopy unit, Dr. Ram Chuttani, at an international conference and liked what he learned of the hospital's offerings.

Everything measured up in person.

"It's an environment with state-of-the-art people, research, procedures and equipment. And the cases are very complicated," says Mizrahi. "It's the top in the field in the U.S. and pretty much in the world."

What's the day of a Fellow like?

"It's very intense. We start at 7 a.m. and end around 11 p.m. There are four Fellows and we are each on call overnight every fourth night and over the weekend once a month. We have one day of clinic a week."

What kinds of cases do you see?

"So far, I've seen well over 300 cases of biliary disease -- gall stones -- more than 250 cases of pancreatic cancer and hundreds of complicated colonic dissections for cancer. And this is just an example."

What's it like for the Mizrahi family in the U.S.?

"We've traveled to Virginia, New York and Maine. The children enjoy winter activities such as skating and snowboarding. But I like winter more than my wife does," Dad says.

What would you like to take back to Israel after your Fellowship?

"I'd like to see more up-to-date equipment in Israel. And I'd like to see changes in the way we're doing procedures. There a lot of other things about the procedures themselves, new techniques and more, that we aren't doing in Israel.

"Also I want to change how we look at patients. I have a lot of ideas about how to increase the volume of patients and better ways to follow patients who need repeat procedures. One of the problems at Hadassah is that we don't keep track of patients well.

“And there are a couple of things I learned here as a faculty member at Harvard that I will suggest for Israeli medical schools. I’m not sure they will be accepted, but I will try. For example: here they have a lot of students from the same year teaching each other. I like that very much. Of course there are instructors to supervise and clarify things, but most of the things the students teach themselves.”

Will your job change when you return?

“My job will change as I am the [presumptive] new head of advanced endoscopy at Hadassah. The current head is retiring. Also, I will likely get a position as an assistant professor of internal medicine at Hebrew University.

“I believe I will be one of Israel’s leaders in the field of advanced endoscopy.”

American Physicians Fellowship for Medicine in Israel

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