

Chapter Member Spotlight

Christopher J. Russell, MD, MS is an Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics in the Division of Hospital Medicine at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. He completed his undergraduate degree in Psychology and Biology at Harvard University, his medical degree at Harvard Medical School, his pediatric residency at the University of California, San Francisco campus and his master of science in Clinical, Biomedical & Translational Investigations from USC. His clinical responsibilities include attending the pediatric inpatient service at CHLA. His current research focuses on improving the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of bacterial respiratory tract infections, such as pneumonia, in children with complex medical conditions. In addition to his research, Dr. Russell works in the CHLA Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, leading trainings on implicit bias and microaggressions for all CHLA employees and spearheading key health equity initiatives. Outside of his DEI work at CHLA, Dr. Russell is the co-director of the Academic Pediatric Association’s New Century Scholars Resident Mentoring Program.



Name: Christopher J. Russell, MD, MS

Practice location: Children’s Hospital Los Angeles

Number of years in practice: 10 years

What do you do before work that sets the tone for your day?

I have a 20-minute drive to work each day, so I always make sure to listen to some music that gets me energized for the day. I can't start my day without an iced coffee, so I make sure to grab one on the way to work or in the coffee cart at the hospital.

What are some challenges or struggles that you face at work?

One personal challenge I face at work is trying to make sure that I have time to get actual work done amid many meetings each day. As one gains more administrative responsibilities, there is always more that's being asked of you, and there's not always the time available to complete everything.

As someone who spends a lot of time writing manuscripts, grants, and working on my research projects, an additional challenge is that there's always more that can be done in any of these areas. I could always edit a manuscript or draft a part of a grant. One challenge is setting limits and making sure that work does not infringe on my personal time.

How do you work through or overcome your challenges or struggles?

In the last several years, I've become fiercely protective of my calendar and my free time. During the work week I block off periods of time to allow me to do things. If I need to concentrate, I close my door at work to get things done so that I don't get distracted by people. For my own personal wellness, I removed my work email from my phone so that I'm not tempted to check it. I don't routinely respond to work emails late at night or over the weekend. If I'm working on something late at night or on the weekend, I may save the email in my draft box and then send it out the next morning.

After work, what do you do for your own wellness?

The current COVID pandemic has made this challenging, as I am someone who likes to go out to dinner and go to music performances, theater, and other shows. Now, after work, I usually spend some time chatting with some of my closest friends. We might talk on the phone or just send text messages. It's always great to send each other silly YouTube videos or memes that make us smile. Because many of my close friends live outside of Southern California, it's even more important for us to catch up because we can't fly and see each other in person.

From what/whom does your inspiration or motivation stem?

My motivation comes from my mother who raised me by herself. We didn't have much, but she always made sure that I focused on my education because she knew that that was the way to get out of poverty. Her support helped me be the first person to graduate from college in my family. My inspiration is from my patients and their families. The amount of sacrifices that parents, caregivers, and other family members made to take care of a child who has multiple medical problems is humbling. As a pediatric hospitalist, whether a child is admitted for a routine problem or something more complex, it is one of the scariest times in the family's life. It's a privilege to work with a family and help them through one of the most difficult times that that family has experienced.

Wellness Tip: What is the one thing you would recommend to our readership to do each day to take care of oneself?

One thing that I've recently started to do is to create a gratitude journal. Each day, I write down three to four things that I'm thankful for that day or that made me smile or laugh. It helps remind me about things that are good and brings back warm memories.