Theodoros N. Teknos, MD,  
HMS Otolaryngology Resident,  
Class of 1996

From medical student to mentor

Ted Teknos, MD, started medical school with an open mind, ready to discover his interests. But soon enough, it took only one anatomic dissection of the head and neck to set his sights on otolaryngology.

“It was the importance of otolaryngology and the complexity of the anatomy that grabbed my attention,” said Dr. Teknos, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery and The David E. Schuller, MD, and Carole Schuller Chair in Otolaryngology at The Ohio State University College of Medicine (OSU COM). “Otolaryngology is how we relate to the outside world—we listen, we speak, we smell, we taste—and otolaryngologists strive to help all people experience that.”

Now a fellowship-trained head and neck surgical oncologist, author of more than 150 scientific papers, and Department Chair at the OSU COM, Dr. Teknos has built a career balancing research and clinical demands with the training of residents and fellows in addition to fulfilling his administrative leadership responsibilities.

A Detroit native, Dr. Teknos earned his undergraduate degree from Wayne State University in 1987 prior to attending Harvard Medical School. During medical school, he spent a significant amount of time with the otolaryngology faculty, who eventually inspired him to stay in Boston to complete his otolaryngology residency at Massachusetts Eye and Ear/ Harvard Medical School.

“The otolaryngology faculty at Mass. Eye and Ear took a keen interest in my career,” said Dr. Teknos. “Many of them became important mentors to me and helped me better understand the field of otolaryngology. They showed me the best of what the field had to offer, and I chose to pursue this field because of them.”

Following residency, Dr. Teknos went to Vanderbilt University Medical Center for a fellowship in head and neck oncology and microvascular reconstruction. He then returned to his home state in 1997 for a faculty position at the University of Michigan. There, he made his way up the academic ladder, becoming the Division Chief of Head and Neck Surgery in 2003.

After five years of leadership, Dr. Teknos was recruited as a Professor to the OSU COM and as the Division Chief of Head and Neck Oncologic Surgery at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute in 2008.

Transitioning to Ohio with some of his research team from the University of Michigan, he built upon his previous work of applying tumor angiogenesis to head and neck cancer, which eventually evolved into studying carcinogenesis, cell signaling, and novel therapeutics. His team’s discoveries culminated most recently with the licensing of a novel therapeutic agent that successfully eradicated Human papillomavirus (HPV)-related tumors by reactivating tumor protein p53.

In 2014, Dr. Teknos was promoted to Chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery at the OSU COM. Under his leadership, faculty recruitment has grown by more than 25 percent, national funding has increased, and the department is unwaveringly committed to its tripartite mission.

“My career has really gone full circle,” said Dr. Teknos. “I’ve grown from a naive medical student, to a young surgeon-scientist, to a department chair fostering the academic mission for others. I find it really interesting and satisfying to have seen my career evolve in this manner.” For Dr. Teknos, his proudest accomplishments are “those achieved by his mentees.”

“Training at Mass. Eye and Ear was a huge privilege. My mentors not only put me on a path of clinical excellence and introduced me to head and neck cancer research, but they also taught me how to be an influential mentor myself,” said Dr. Teknos. “Mass. Eye and Ear has had a great impact on the field of otolaryngology across the world and being a part of that legacy is a great thing.”