



Vascular Surgery & Endovascular Therapy

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Integrity of Intent: Dr. Luka Pocivavsek's Passion for Intricate Problem-Solving Leads Him to Create Personalized Treatment Plans for Patients with Aortic Dissections

Luka Pocivavsek, MD, PhD, is an expert vascular surgeon and a devoted researcher who improves vascular care by investigating innovative treatments and techniques for better outcomes and quality of life for his patients. His research focuses on improving treatment for patients with aortic dissections.

Staying the course

Dr. Pocivavsek had a charmed graduate school experience, which was due in large part to the dynamic leadership of chemist Ka Yee C. Lee, PhD, David Lee Shillinglaw Distinguished Service Professor and Provost of the University of Chicago. The infusion of camaraderie and robust collaboration into an academic setting allows for a safe space to innovate, discover and solve complex problems.

Dr. Pocivavsek's ingress into the world of clinical medicine was not simple. From being a local science expert to crossing a new threshold into a clinical setting was overawing. "I thought to myself, maybe you're just barking up the wrong tree, as it concerns clinical medicine," he said. "I figured that maybe it was just something that wasn't right for me."

Dr. Pocivavsek had even decided not to do a residency. Although he was drawn to medicine, he hadn't yet obtained the same footing as he had as a scientist. This disconnect was unnerving, and, after careful contemplation, he gathered that a career as a scientist was adequately fulfilling. However, a shift occurred during his last clerkship rotation when he met Professor of Surgery Nora Jaskowiak, MD. "I think she runs one of the best surgical clerkships in the country," said Dr. Pocivavsek.

"She makes it a point that students have a good experience, and she wants them to get the most out of their training," he said. The University of Chicago's Pritzker School of Medicine provided Dr. Pocivavsek with a transformative educational experience. Had he gone to any other medical school, he might not have become the renowned surgeon-scientist he is today.

He also attributes the success of his multidimensional pursuit to another mentor in the Department of Surgery, Professor of Surgery Roger D. Hurst, MD.

"I'm a powerful believer that throughout life, you encounter individuals who are very significant. You'll come across people who really influence you. And then, in retrospect, when you look at it 10 years back or 20 years back, you're like, wow, had I not met this person, at that particular time, my life would have been very different. It doesn't mean it would have been better or worse, it just would've been very different, and meeting Dr. Hurst is definitely one of those pivotal moments for me."

Connecting the dots

What was key then to Dr. Pocivavsek, and equally essential now, was the ability to interdigitate science with medicine; it was imperative to him that he found synergy between the two forces.

"If I couldn't find the connection, I thought to myself, there's really no point in me doing this," he said. Yet, when he scrubbed in with Dr. Hurst, Dr. Pocivavsek's intellectual curiosity swelled as he connected the dots and realized that Dr. Hurst applied to surgery the same type of geometric analysis and intense problem-solving as he had done in his research with Dr. Lee.

This seeded a profound realization—that he could use the same skill set he applied to science in a clinical setting. This aha moment was largely impactful for Dr. Pocivavsek, and it cemented his path into surgery.

"In order to stay on track, you have to keep your love for solving problems inside of you; it has to be what drives you," said Dr. Pocivavsek.



"There are a lot of hard moments in clinical medicine that involve emotional stress, and there are challenging moments in science in the sense that you get told no, papers get rejected, grants get rejected; the feeling of failure seeps in. Through it all, you must keep your love for solving problems."

The motivation to keep going must be pure, and not contingent on successes. Dr. Pocivavsek is motivated by his strong desire to solve complex problems—configuring elaborate puzzles that connect his scientific and his clinical practice. This is how he continues to educate himself and offer better solutions to his patients. Thus, the integrity of Dr. Pocivavsek's intentions will enable his work to keep soaring.

Within the nucleus of the University of Chicago's academic biome is a collective appetite for intricate problem-solving that requires a plethora of multidisciplinary methods and applications. There, too, exists an inquisitive spirit—one that asks the fundamental questions that lead to polygonal investigations and deep dives into multifactorial studies. To that end, Dr. Pocivavsek immerses himself in scientific enigmas in an effort to uncover better treatment options for patients with aortic dissections.

Learn more about Dr. Pocivavsek's research interests by reading [How Understanding Patient Anatomy Can Lead to More Personalized Treatments for Aortic Dissections](#) that he recently wrote for UChicago Medicine.



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