

An interview with...

Alastair Carruthers, MA, BM, BCh, FRCP(LON), FRCPC
Clinical Professor, Department of Dermatology, University of British Columbia
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Dr. Alastair Carruthers is Clinical Professor in the Department of Dermatology and Skin Science at the University of British Columbia (UBC). He received his medical degree from Brasenose College, Oxford (UK) in 1969, did his dermatology residency at St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin in London and completed his graduate studies in dermatologic surgery at the University of California, San Francisco (USA) in 1982. During his 30 years of practice, Dr. Carruthers has made several major contributions to the field of dermatology. Foremost among these is the use of BOTOX® for cosmetic applications, a discovery he made with his wife, Dr. Jean Carruthers, in 1987. He has also worked extensively on the problem of facial lipoatrophy associated with HIV infection. He has over 125 peer-reviewed articles to his credit and has authored numerous text books and book chapters. He is a member of several associations, including the American Dermatological Association and the Canadian Dermatology Association, where he served as President from 1998 to 1999. In addition, he was President of the Canadian Society for Dermatologic Surgery (1997-8) and served as President of the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (2006-7). He is currently Grand Piliier General of the Commanderie du Canada, Confrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin reflecting his interest in fine wines especially from Burgundy.

What made you decide to become a dermatologic surgeon?

I have always enjoyed doing things with my hands, but curiously "surgery" did not attract me at all. I always considered myself as a physician rather than a surgeon. However when I got into dermatology and saw the new field of dermatologic surgery with its combination of dexterity and intelligence, it appealed to me immediately.

Who has been the most important influence on your career?

I know it sounds corny, but those readers who know us will agree that I must answer my wife, Jean. Firstly, she encouraged me to go into dermatology and then to do my fellowship in San Francisco. At the same time as I was doing a dermatologic surgery fellowship, she was learning about botulinum toxin and as a result she invented a whole new area of specialization which has dramatically changed dermatologic surgery. She did not just influence my career, she invented it!

What is the focus of your practice?

My practice consists of a large part cosmetic dermatologic surgery as well as clinical research. I find that having both is a nice balance for me.

Do you have a favorite procedure that you perform? Why?

For the almost 20 years that I did micrographic surgery, I would have answered that the reconstruction was my favorite part of the procedure. Now, I have to say that reconstructing faces with the new fillers gives me as much satisfaction.

What's been the most important innovation in dermatologic surgery?

The invention of Mohs micrographic surgery, especially the fresh tissue technique, followed by Sam Stegman's explorations of reconstruction with flaps and grafts, has changed dermatology forever. All other innovations in our area are small by comparison with these huge changes. Jeff Klein's invention of the tumescent technique is another huge advance that has allowed us to do not

just liposuction but other procedures including reconstructions safely and effectively without using general anesthesia. This is a short list but there are many other important innovations.

What was the best item you purchased for your practice? Why?

The Quantum Intense Pulsed Light from Lumenis. When we purchased this machine eight years ago, resurfacing was still in the dark ages of micro-dermabrasion, dermabrasion, chemical peels, etc. Suddenly, we could not just treat the face but other areas of the body safely and effectively. I think that this has dramatically changed the whole area of improving the fabric of the skin.

Tell us about your most memorable patient.

I have had many wonderful patients over the past 30-odd years that I have been in practice. Many of them have had important lessons for me and I often find myself remembering them at important moments. The wonderful thing about these individuals is the way that they have instructed me gently and without too much damage to my coronary arteries.

Complete the sentence, "I can't live without my..."

Wife and family – they are the center of my life.

What are your interests outside of dermatologic surgery?

I enjoy biking, the wines of Burgundy, reading novels, golf and walking the dog.

What is the value of being involved with the ASDS?

ASDS is still a small organization. It is very much influenced by the membership and the opportunities to get involved and to influence the governance of ASDS is high. I would strongly encourage all dermatologic surgeons to join ASDS and also to volunteer for committee work. This is vital to our future!

Do you have a favorite quote, saying or words-to-live-by?

Favorite quote, from General Douglas MacArthur "Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old by deserting their ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up wrinkles the soul." ■