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# Intuitive Hawkeye Healing occurs at the junction of humor and empathy

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By: Lisette Hilton



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**Mark A. Price, M.D.**, was drawn to medicine at a young age. He was fascinated by the character, Hawkeye Pierce, portrayed by Alan Alda on the television show **M\*A\*S\*H\***, who handled trauma and dealt with potential devastation by bringing levity to life-altering events. But it would be his love for creating art and his desire for variety that would sway him to plastic surgery.



**PATIENT AS PARTNER** today, as chief of the division of plastic surgery at napa kaiser permanente, napa, calif., dr. price devotes more than 60 percent of his practice to reconstructive work. he repairs the outward signs of trauma and works to help ease the fear and emotional turmoil often associated with these cases.

Dr. Price, who is published in the areas of facial trauma and fracture, says, "I try to make the experience as atraumatic as possible, with a laugh and a trusting relationship. This helps to get people through, whether it is a mastectomy reconstruction, major melanoma excision and reconstruction of the face or an elective cosmetic procedure," he says.

His philosophy on healing is to partner with his patients, devise a surgical plan that they understand and agree with, and take them through the perioperative period as comfortably as possible. His guiding principle, he says, is to treat every patient as he would his own family.

**PLASTIC ATTRACTION** While the T.V. Character, Hawkeye, inspired Dr. Price to pursue a medical career, his was a winding journey toward deciding on a specialty.

"Mind-brain issues always fascinated me, and I majored in neuroscience at Stanford, but I dismissed it because you just were not able to regularly and reliably take patients through an experience and get a great result in the end," Dr. Price says. "I also looked at trauma surgery — hoping to undo devastating acute traumatic events — but realized that it requires pretty routine protocols and does not have an enormously creative element to it."

**LIFE SPECTRUM** An only child who emigrated with his parents from England to the United States at age four, Dr. Price says he has always had a creative side, and has enjoyed drawing and painting since childhood. He was attracted to plastic surgery because it is a creative endeavor requiring practice over a lifetime.

"In medical school, I realized that plastic surgery was unlike any other surgical specialty in the breath and scope of what the surgeons did on a daily basis. It helps the full spectrum of patients — from infants to elderly — and includes the range of surgical possibilities, from microsurgery to taking the body apart and reassembling it on a macro scale," he says.

**ON THE ROAD** His desire to undo individual devastation is not limited to the work he does stateside.

Dr. Price first set out during his residency at Stanford to do overseas volunteer mission work with Interplast, a long-established group of plastic surgeons that originated at Stanford. In his chief year, he traveled to the Thai-Cambodian border, Peruvian Amazon and the coast of Brazil.

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"[We were] primarily fixing cleft lips and palates on these three trips. We went to some of the poorest areas to find some of the unluckiest babies in the world — those who had been born with major facial disfigurement which is thought of in some of those cultures as a sign of evil or the devil. Sometimes, these children are ostracized or sent away from their families. So, to be able to dramatically impact these babies' lives in a matter of a couple of hours' of surgery and change lives in a positive way for no material incentive is tremendously rewarding," Dr. Price reflects.

Earlier this year, Dr. Price traveled on a charity medical mission with the Peruvian-American Medical Society to the High Andes in Ayacucho, Peru, which is at an altitude of about 9,000 feet. The Peruvian-American Medical Society estimates that there is one doctor for every 12,000 people in Ayacucho, the third poorest state in Peru.

Pages | 1 | 2

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