

# From Medieval Literature to Neuropathology

## Distinguished Alumnus

The son of a neurologist, the last thing David Louis wanted to be was a doctor. In fact, he chose a college major that couldn't be further from medicine: Medieval English Literature. His goal was to get a PhD, then teach. But, while still an undergraduate, his natural skills for medicine kept surfacing—obvious to everyone but himself. One day, his professor took him aside and spoke the words that would change his life: “You can be a doctor and still be interested in literature, but you can't become a literature professor and still practice medicine.”

David Louis, '85, took those words to heart, and went on to medical school, while maintaining a healthy interest in his passion for medieval English literature.

He chose Stony Brook University School of Medicine for both practical and personal reasons. A SUNY school relatively close to home, it was convenient and affordable. And, his father, a member of the faculty since the medical school first opened, spoke highly of Stony Brook's clinical training. He came away with lessons and experiences that both shaped his career and influenced the way he thought about medicine.

“One of the best things Stony Brook gave me as a medical student was incredible exposure to the full range of clinical medicine,” Dr. Louis says. “It instilled a deep appreciation for clinical medicine, in turn giving me perspective for the breadth of medical practice.”

His experiences ranged from seeing clinic patients in Shirley to a urology rotation in Queens to rounding at the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical

Center. “Each gave me a distinct picture of the practice of clinical medicine,” he says. Dr. Louis also credits many of his professors for giving him the necessary skills for success.

These skills led him to a fourth-year elective at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, where he developed an interest in brain tumors, and to residencies in internal medicine and pathology, all ultimately propelling him into his current specialty, neuropathology.

Today, as Chief of Service in the Department of Pathology at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, and the Benjamin Castleman Professor of Pathology at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Louis holds one of the top positions in an academic pathology service in the United States, and, some would say, the world. He has won many awards including, most recently, the Zulch Prize of the Max Planck Society, the highest award given in Germany for neurological research.

Considered one of the foremost neuropathologists in the world, Dr. Louis has performed basic and translational research that has revolutionized the diagnosis and treatment of brain tumors. According to nominator Roberta Seidman, MD, Clinical Associate Professor of Pathology at Stony Brook, “When neuropathologists want to know what is standard care for neuro-oncology patients, and when there are questions about what is necessary diagnostically or controversies in the field, Dr. Louis is the person to whom we all turn for the best answer or the best course to follow.”



David Louis, MD

To his credit, Dr. Louis has been able to combine a large clinical practice and administrative responsibilities with research on brain tumors and the training of medical students, residents, and researchers. “The diagnosis, treatment, and study of brain tumors is both an art and a science,” he explains. “The challenge is fulfilling. The clinical aspect allows me to make an immediate difference, and collaborate with other physicians for the best patient outcomes, while the research and administrative roles give me opportunities to make changes within the field.”

Of course, for a young medical student who balanced the study of medicine with a love of literature, finding a balance between interests comes naturally. “I may be doing research, seeing biopsies, working on policy, but I also make time for family life. It's one of the many lessons I learned while at Stony Brook University School of Medicine—that a wide range of interests need not be mutually exclusive and, in fact, a broad perspective can give you the tools you need to be even more successful.” ■