

## Neal M. Lonky, MD '82, MPH

2010 Distinguished Alumnus

The decision to become a doctor is a daunting one. Once made, an equally challenging one torments most medical students: Should I become a surgeon? An internist? A researcher? A neurologist?

Dr. Neal Lonky's choice between pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology required hours of deliberation and consultations with mentors and colleagues, but ultimately paid off with a career that's both professionally rewarding and personally gratifying.

"We docs are pretty intelligent, but that is just not enough," says Dr. Lonky. "Success is about choices, timing, and the relationships we build along the way."

Dr. Lonky is an Elected Member of the Board of Directors and Director of Colposcopic Services at Southern California Permanente Medical Group, and a Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at University of California, Irvine School of Medicine. He is a published researcher and expert in female lower genital tract neoplasia and cancer prevention, serving on many expert review and guideline committees for screening policy held at the National Institutes of Health. In addition, he holds several patents on innovative diagnostic and surgical devices.

Looking back, the signs pointing him toward a successful ob/gyn career were all there, recalls Dr. Lonky. His first assigned mentor at Stony Brook was Dr. Burt Kromholtz, a past president of the American Society of Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology and a noted expert in lower genital tract disease at

the time—the same field in which Dr. Lonky is now himself recognized as an expert. At the time, however, Dr. Lonky instead pursued a pediatric mentor. Although he later wished he had seized the opportunity to mentor with Dr. Kromholtz, the seed for his future specialty had been planted.

Dr. Lonky was also hesitant about pursuing ob/gyn due to a nagging uncertainty about his surgical skills. That is until Stony Brook professor and vascular surgeon Dr. Fabio Giron convinced him that he had the talent to be a great surgeon. More valuable advice came from Stony Brook ob/gyn attendings and residents, including Drs. Dave Kreiner, Eva Chalas, Debbie Davenport, and the many others who served as models of what it was to be a great doctor, and be able to enjoy life at the same time.

Dr. Lonky didn't make his final choice until his fourth-year elective in neonatology at University of California, San Diego. Dr. Louis Gluck, known to Dr. Lonky as the "father of modern neonatology," was Dr. Lonky's attending physician. When he learned that Dr. Lonky was applying for both a pediatrics and ob/gyn residency, he confided that he saw that the future favored ob/gyn. This was a pivotal moment and one that solidified Dr. Lonky's decision and career path.

Attending Stony Brook University School of Medicine was another one of Dr. Lonky's "first great decisions." Here he could stay close to his family on Long Island. And, Stony Brook was where he met his future wife, nursing



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student Naomi Levine, a member of the Class of '81. Stony Brook was where he felt "at home," with its population of diverse students, patients, and faculty members. "Stony Brook was a 'melting pot' in every way," he says. "I truly developed my multi-cultural sensitivity at that time."

His Stony Brook-born cultural sensitivity and willingness to face down the status quo has served Dr. Lonky well in his clinical practice, as an inventor of new medical devices and knowledge; and in his medical and humanity missions overseas in Mexico, China, Korea, the Philippines, and other Asian nations; and his current work as a Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness chapter in Orange County, California.

Yet for Dr. Lonky, beyond helping him to develop exceptional clinical skills and providing the vital support that helped him build confidence, Stony Brook is where he discovered the importance of tolerance and respect for patients and fellow healthcare professionals.

"Success, to me," he said, "is measured by the capability to work hard and give the great care that matters to those you care for and work with." ■