

INTRODUCING DR. MARC LEVITT

Conversation with Dr. Marc Levitt | CTO Founder & Pediatric Surgeon

[Introducing Dr. Marc Levitt]

[Marc Levitt, Pediatric Surgeon, CTO Founder, Washington D.C., USA]

Hi, my name is Marc Levitt. I'm a pediatric surgeon, with a specialty in colorectal surgery for children. These are children that have problems with emptying their bowels, they cannot stool normally, something we take for granted. My father's a physician, a neurologist. I have an older brother who has cerebral palsy, and that affected our lives in a very dramatic way, very positive way, made us all wanna help the world.

I'm told I wanted to be a doctor when I was aged 3, and I knew right away I wanted to be a surgeon. And I vividly remember when I was 12 years old, I had appendicitis, went to the hospital, had terrible pain, and a surgeon came and fixed me. And the next day I felt better, and that's what I wanted to do.

So, I went to college and medical school. I got very lucky. I signed up for an elective in my fourth year of medical school, which influenced the rest of my career. Before then though, when I was deciding that I wanted to do surgery, I was very disappointed because I really liked my pediatrics rotation and lamented the fact that I couldn't do both. Until a senior medical student said, "Marc, you know there's a specialty called pediatric surgery? You could combine your two loves.", and that's what I decided to pursue. Well, during that elective I somewhat randomly was assigned to spend the month with Alberto Peña, who is well recognized as the father of pediatric colorectal surgery in the world. In large part because he invented an operation. He did an operation for children born with no anal opening, in a way that had never been done before. The first time he did that surgery was in 1980, which by modern standards is very recent for a brand new operation. And it was a new technique that revolutionized the care of these children and improved the anatomic reconstruction, and the success with continence, and it spread throughout the whole world. And I met him only about a decade after he had invented that surgery, so I was really in the early part of that process, and that has exploded into an entire field of pediatric colorectal, with care of many other conditions. So, I saw that from the very beginning.

Alberto, Dr. Peña in those days is what I used to call him, took care of all parts of the patient. All. Including the urology, obviously the colorectal, the gynecology. He would joke that if someone called the office and said, "could I please speak to the colorectal surgeon?", he would

say “you got him”, “okay, now can you connect me to the urologist?”, he would say “I’m doing that as well”, “the gynecologist?”, “I got that covered”, “I need the social worker, I need the psychology”. He took care of it all, which was amazing. But with the complexity of care, and also, I did not have advanced training in urology like he did in those days and many people did, I needed colleagues. And that was the moment where I really recognized that to take care of these complex patients requires a team of devoted specialists in all areas of their care, including a deep team of nursing. And then I began to work on that challenge and try to get good at colorectal care myself in my continued training, but also to develop partnerships with all these other specialties.

Alberto Peña and I were working together in New York and we were not succeeding in developing this full-fledged and integrated team. And actually, the first place that had the idea, well, we had the idea, but the first place that was able to really deliver on that idea was Cincinnati Children’s, where Alberto and I went in 2005 to start the first ever colorectal center for children in the world. And we loved it, and we were very successful, and we were there for 10 years. And subsequent to that, people caught onto the idea, and I realized that I could train people in colorectal, who could then go forth with those skills and develop similar centers. I’m very proud to say that there are now 25 or even 30 centers around the world who have such an experience for patients with the integrated care and a devoted team for colorectal. Many of them are run by individuals that I have the privilege to help train, and these are colleagues that I see regularly at meetings and we coordinate our efforts. And that’s led to today, where we have a multifunctioning multi-integrated and -disciplinary team, where everyone takes care of the patient as a unit and each brings their own skillset to help the child.