

Photo courtesy of MD Anderson Cancer Center



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GIVING HOPE TO SICK CHILDREN

DR. ANDREA HAYES-JORDAN WAS THE FIRST PEDIATRIC SURGEON TO PERFORM A HIGH-RISK, LIFE-SAVING PROCEDURE IN CHILDREN WITH A RARE FORM OF CANCER.

FOR SOME PHYSICIANS, THERE'S ONE PATIENT WHO STANDS OUT among others as a challenge, an inspiration, or both. For Andrea Hayes-Jordan D '87, MED '91, that patient was a twelve-year-old boy whom she met in 2000 while a pediatric surgical oncology fellow at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

The boy suffered from desmoplastic small round cell tumor (DSRCT), a rare cancer that often forms in the abdomen and presents as dozens to hundreds of tiny tumors. He had so many abdominal tumors that it was going to be impossible to remove them all, and Hayes-Jordan had to tell the boy's mother that there was nothing they could do for him. It was a horrible task, one she never wanted to repeat.

"One of the reasons I went into surgery," Hayes-Jordan says, "is because I could fix something immediately. Talking to this mother was the worst feeling in the world."

Motivated by that experience, in 2006 Hayes-Jordan became the first surgeon in North America to perform a high-risk procedure called hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy (HIPEC) on a pediatric patient with DSRCT. The

procedure involves removing the tumors and then washing the abdominal cavity with hot chemotherapy to prevent the cancer from recurring. Now a professor in the Department of Pediatric Surgery at the University of Texas Medical School in Houston and in the Department of Surgical Oncology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and director of pediatric surgery and pediatric surgical oncology at MD Anderson, Hayes-Jordan has done over 150 HIPEC procedures in pediatric patients, doubling their chances at survival from 30 percent to 60 percent. And when she's not seeing patients, Hayes-Jordan is in her lab, working with medical students to identify the origins of DSRCT and to find a way to prevent it, or traveling the world to teach other physicians how to perform the life-saving HIPEC procedure.

"My mother tells me that since I

could talk I said I wanted to be a 'baby doctor,'" says Hayes-Jordan, whose pioneering career as a surgeon, researcher, and teacher took shape at Dartmouth. Hayes-Jordan entered Dartmouth Medical School wanting to be a pediatrician. But during her third-year surgery rotation with Dartmouth-Hitchcock surgeon Dr. Thomas Colacchio, her focus began to shift. The following year, as a subintern at Stanford, she studied pediatric surgery, and she immediately knew it was what she wanted to do. Her chairperson at Stanford was a pediatric surgical oncologist, and his work solidified Hayes-Jordan's interest in that surgical specialty.

With encouragement from her family, classmates, and Dr. Colacchio, Hayes-Jordan pursued her passion, becoming the first black, female pediatric surgeon in the United States. She has also had the invaluable support of her husband, Darin Jordan, a former NFL player who gave up football to be a stay-at-home dad to their son and daughter, now in their early twenties.

"I tried to get them to go to Dartmouth, but my daughter doesn't like snow and my son wanted a smaller school. I bleed green!" laughs Hayes-Jordan, who looks forward to having more opportunities to give back to her alma mater now that her children are grown. In the meantime, she's busy continuing her fight against pediatric cancer.

"It's a calling. Because the children can be very ill and the outcome may not always be perfect, you have to be extremely committed and you have to love it."

LAUREN SEIDMAN