

Zane Cohen, MD
ASCRS Research Foundation Mentor Award
2004

Zane Cohen is a deserving recipient of the Mentor Award of the American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgery because he has had a profound effect on stimulating and mentoring individuals in the field of colorectal surgery and for his efforts in developing the specialty of colorectal surgery in Canada.

Zane completed medical school and residency at the University of Toronto and then went to Edinburgh to do further training in colorectal surgery. As part of this, he spent some time at St. Mark's Hospital. Zane Cohen then came on faculty at the University of Toronto and Toronto General Hospital in 1977. He quickly rose to the rank of Professor of Surgery. In addition, he has held the position of Surgeon-in-Chief at the Mount Sinai Hospital since 1990 and Chair of the Division of General Surgery at the University of Toronto since 1999.

Zane Cohen developed an interest in colorectal surgery early in his career when there were few surgeons in Canada who had a specific interest in colorectal surgery. He began not only promoting the specialty of colorectal surgery at the University of Toronto but also across Canada. He continues to be a strong advocate of colorectal surgery as a sub-specialty within academic departments. The first colorectal surgery training program in Canada was started at the University of Toronto in 1984 largely because of Zane's efforts. This was accomplished despite the fact that colorectal surgery was not recognized as a sub-specialty by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Even though the Residency Review Committee has no jurisdiction outside of the US, he persuaded them to review the program, accredit it and thus it received accreditation by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Furthermore, fellows completing the program were eligible to write the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgeons board exams. This led to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada recognizing colorectal surgery as a sub-specialty and opened the doors to other programs in Canada. However, the colorectal surgery program at the University of Toronto is still the only training program in Canada.

To date, approximately 30 surgeons have trained in colorectal surgery at the University of Toronto. These have included many Canadians who now hold posts at university centres across Canada including the Universities of Calgary, Manitoba, Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto, as well as Queen's, and McMaster University. As well, trainees have come from other countries including, Australia, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Israel, Saudia Arabia, Switzerland and the USA. Many of these have successfully completed the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery exams. Many hold academic positions in their respective countries.

In addition to these efforts, Zane Cohen and Phil Gordon were also instrumental in starting the Canadian Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. Zane was the founding Vice President and subsequently became the President. As a result of these efforts, Zane is recognized throughout Canada for his role in developing the specialty, training individuals and developing colorectal surgery in academic centres.

Clinically Zane has an interest in inflammatory bowel disease. He began performing the Kock pouch soon after his faculty appointment and has performed over 300 of these procedures. As well, he is recognized for his expertise in performing the ileoanal pouch procedure with a series of over 1500 patients. The IBD Program at the University of Toronto is recognized internationally. He also began the Familial Polyposis Registry and this has grown into a multi-disciplinary GI Familial Cancer Registry which receives internal funding as well as external funding from numerous agencies including the NIH. Zane has published approximately 200 papers mainly on the topics of inflammatory bowel disease and familial adenomatous polyposis. He has been a visiting professor in Canada, the US, and internationally. He is a member of multiple august societies.

Zane remains a role model for many colorectal surgeons across Canada. His clinical accomplishments are many. He has guided the University of Toronto Colorectal Program and has supported individuals in his own department to become leaders in academic surgery in Canada and internationally. He has supported trainees, both clinically and academically. He is an excellent technical surgeon and a superb teacher in the operating room. He is also an outstanding role model being able to juggle an extremely busy clinical practice with significant administrative duties. Zane Cohen is well respected by his many trainees and peers and it is therefore a great tribute to him for receiving this prestigious award.

Written by: Robin McLeod, MD