

John Miller, PhD, MD: Renaissance Man



For surgeon John Miller, PhD, MD, he finds his love of science, medicine and the creative arts makes for a nice life balance. "I think it is important for us to use our entire brain. I remember when I was training to be a physician, I would get up and paint as a way to take a break from studying," says Dr. Miller. "It would relax my mind. When I returned to my studies after painting, it was often a lot more fruitful."

While he keeps extremely busy as Chief of Vascular Surgery at Eisenhower Medical Center (this is his second stint), Miller manages to chip away at a fiction novel nestled in his desk drawer. Board Certified in General Surgery, Surgical Critical Care and Vascular Surgery and certified by the Board of Holistic Medicine, Dr. Miller is also diligently working with a colleague on a non-fiction book that has generated interest from a New York-based publisher. As if that weren't enough diversity, Miller is an accomplished painter (he has done some medical illustration as well) and is a reservist with the Air Force, serving as the Chief of Hospital Service with his squadron.

Although he has been writing and painting since he was young, as the grandson of a physician and the son of a surgeon, it seems Miller was somewhat destined to become a doctor. "We actually have a line of doctors in our family that can be traced back to Ireland some 400 years," explains Dr. Miller, whose education included studies at Yale University and Stanford University. "No one pushed me into surgery, however. My family told me to do whatever made me happy. Still, when you grow up in a service family...it sort of just picks you." "You can take someone who does not have circulation in the leg, and the person is about to lose the limb, and you can cure them. In most cases, the results are immediate. That's what I like about my work."

Miller says he finds vascular surgery particularly fascinating because the body depends on blood flow to work. "We are restoring blood flow, and it is very precise and technical, and the results can be very automatic," says Dr. Miller. "For instance, you can take someone who does not have circulation in the leg, and the person is about to lose the limb, and you can cure them. In most cases, the results are immediate. That's what I like about my work." Miller says there is also something very fundamental as a physician to want to restore the body or to renew it to the best of his ability. "That's what surgery affords me. It is very satisfying."

Dr. Miller even draws similarities between surgery and painting. "Painting is a lot like surgery. It is a hand-eye thing. I am looking for a specific result, but I have to go with the flow. I may come across something that is a bit different and modify what I need to do, and in the end, there is a finished product. I find both processes can be inspirational."

Miller is impressed with the vision and direction he sees at Eisenhower Medical Center and is impressed with the medical staff, nurses and administration. But, of course, Dr. Miller has several other projects, both for the page and the canvas, which he has simmering. "It is hard to find the time as a surgeon to get to all these things," he reflects, "but it is very important to make the time."