

Christopher Cantilena, MD

DESTINED FOR DOCTOR



A Master SCUBA Diver, Dr. Cantilena is also an avid photographer and loves astronomy.

Growing up in Brooklyn in the sixties, Christopher Cantilena was enthralled with the world beamed to him over the television. What fascinated young Christopher the most was the groundbreaking work of Drs. Christiaan Barnard (credited with the world's first human-to-human heart transplant) and Michael DeBakey. "That is when I remember having the first inkling of what I wanted to do," says Christopher Cantilena, MD, Section Chief of Anesthesiology at Eisenhower Medical Center.

Cantilena enrolled at Loyola University in Chicago to study the pre-medical sciences, but not long into his studies he realized he wasn't enjoying it very much. "It was all 'bench' science, and it didn't have any relevance to my daily life," explains Cantilena. Ultimately, Cantilena graduated with a degree in philosophy and psychology.

Following college, however, Cantilena went to work as a psychiatric technician. "Working around doctors," he shares, "I got the bug again. I decided that I really did want to go to medical school." He returned to undergraduate work part time in order to complete the basic science requirements, and then attended Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine on a Navy scholarship. He graduated in 1988, and began an internship in Surgery at the Naval Medical Center in Portsmouth, Virginia.

It was at this point that family considerations began weighing heavily on his mind. His oldest daughter had been born during his third year of medical school; and his second, during the internship. "I realized if I did a surgical residency, I was never going to see these kids," shares Dr. Cantilena. Fate interceded, as at that time, the Navy happened to be short on anesthesiologists, and he was offered a residency position in that specialty. "When I realized that as an anesthesiologist, I would be spending almost 100 percent of my time in the OR [operating room], and not have to maintain an office practice as well, that settled it for me," Dr. Cantilena confides.

"Today, as an anesthesiologist in Eisenhower Medical Center's OR, Dr. Cantilena is part clinician, part psychologist, part philosopher, part father — a perfect melding of his education and personality."

Today, as an anesthesiologist in Eisenhower Medical Center's OR, Dr. Cantilena is part clinician, part psychologist, part philosopher, part father — a perfect melding of his education and personality. "The best part of my job is being able to help people through a very stressful experience," says Dr. Cantilena. "The surgeon is there to do the procedure and make them better. I am there to keep them safe, and to provide comfort, relaxation and pain relief."

He is especially proud to be part of the Eisenhower staff. "We have a great group of surgeons and the nursing staff is first-rate," shares Dr. Cantilena.

Dr. Cantilena's wife Carol enjoys being a docent at The Living Desert. They will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary in July with a trip to Italy. Daughter Samantha was just accepted to law school, and daughter Kimberly is studying to be a nutritionist/personal trainer. A Master SCUBA Diver, Dr. Cantilena is also an avid photographer and loves astronomy.

The next step? Medical management. Dr. Cantilena is currently pursuing management coursework through the American College of Physician Executives. "It has reawakened a real love for medicine," he shares. "In an administrative role, I am able to be of genuine service to my colleagues, and at the same time, effect the health of dozens of patients at once."