



7 Questions With...

**Gary D. Hammer,
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physician-scientist

director

climber

1. What do you do at UMHS?

As a scientist, I serve as director of the Center for Organogenesis and study how stem cells contribute to the normal growth of the adrenal gland during fetal life and to the development of adrenal failure and adrenal cancer. In my role as clinician, I direct the Endocrine Oncology Program where, with gifted collaborators, we focus both on the treatment of patients with adrenal cancer and on translating discoveries into new therapies for the disease.

2. Why is this interesting to you?

To uncover new biologic knowledge is intrinsically satisfying and exciting. In the lab, I am fulfilled when trainees discover a new piece to the puzzle and become energized to dedicate their careers to science and medicine. In the clinic, I am perpetually amazed at the compassion and pursuit of excellence of all of the people I work with who strive to provide the very best “patient-centered” and “science-driven” care. Above all, it is our patients who are touchstones of courage and grace and remind us that hope is a powerful force that pushes scientific inquiry forward toward cures.

3. When you're not working, what do you do?

Our three children, Max, Maggie and Zach, have drawn my wife Lisa (UMHS pediatrician) and me into their newfound world of rock climbing. We converted our basement into a virtual rock-climbing cave replete with sloping walls, overhanging ledges and other requisite climbing paraphernalia. Our travel revolves around trips to climbing destinations for the kids, where they compete in local and national/international competitions.

4. Who had the greatest influence on your career path?

My uncle died of leukemia when I was teenager — he still serves as a role model for me on the importance of living a fully engaged and authentic life; my mother, who was a caring nurse and mom to three who taught us the transformative power of selflessness; and Bo Schembechler, who brought me to Michigan to build an adrenal program that pushed science forward to better our care of patients and bring us closer to a cure.

5. Who or what inspires you?

The many men, women and children with adrenal cancer who share their fear, courage and hope as they entrust their care to our team. They inspire me to demand more for us all in the laboratory and clinic.

6. What is something your colleagues don't know about you?

I began college as a theatre major and directed a Shakespearean acting company. I also enjoyed mime, juggling and riding my unicycle to and from classes. Years later, in my wife Lisa's college gymnastics gym, I broke my back. I got a sympathy date from her that resulted in our marriage six years later.

7. What's the most thrilling or adventurous thing you've ever done?

During a recent trip to Chile where our son, Max, participated in the Pan Am Games (for rock climbing), we climbed the active Villarrica volcano in a grueling, 10-person expedition.

