



Dr. Michael McMullan

# #GETTING TOKNOWDOS

## Dr. Michael McMullan

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**SS: What do you believe will be the biggest challenge for the surgical community after COVID?**

**MM:** I believe in the immediate post-COVID period, we may see patients reluctant to come in for surgery due of fear of hospital environments, and it may last for some period of time in many hospitals. I've seen some evidence of that over the last year, although it seems to be improving.

I feel one of the positive things we're going to see is what we've been able to develop from the telemedicine and telehealth platforms. I think it's going to completely change the way we practice medicine because being able to communicate with people in their homes or at distance will enable them to learn more about a surgery program or a surgery center—maybe in a way they wouldn't have been able to previously. I think there's high likelihood they will then choose programs they otherwise may not have considered. For instance, patients may be willing to come to University of Washington or Seattle Children's from the extended region after getting to know our programs and providers a little better via Webex, Zoom, etc.

**SS: What has been the most significant or unexpected lesson (professional or personal) for you from COVID?**

**MM:** Honestly, I think one of the biggest lessons for me has been how uncertainty about the duration of COVID or things like COVID can lead to missed opportunities.

If we look at our kids, they left school early and no one really knows how long it's going to last. So one might argue that home education wasn't really developed to be as robust as it could have been because no one was really expected it to last this long.

There have been so many missed opportunities. Tens of thousands of people are going to look back on this year and say, "damn, I wish I had taken that opportunity to learn a foreign language or to play a musical instrument." All the things we probably would have done if we had known this was going to be a year or two process of isolating or working from home.

That being said, I did pick up ukulele, which I enjoy immensely. I probably wouldn't have done it if we didn't have COVID. I play guitar so I purchased a ukulele in Hawaii years ago. It sat in its case for about four years and I thought to myself, "well, I'll start playing with this thing" and I love it. I've developed skills I never would have expected with it.

**SS: Do you have any post-COVID travel plans?**

**MM:** Our family's going to Texas for my nephew's wedding and to visit family this summer. I would also like to go to Hawaii sometime in the next year or two to tour some ukulele factories and try playing some of the hand-made varieties.



Michael out with his favorite music critics

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**SS: Which island is known for making ukuleles?**

**MM:** Most of the factories that make the really well-known ukuleles are on Oahu. The places that have been around for about 100 years.

**SS: What is something you accomplished this past year that you are most proud of?**

**MM:** I'm most proud I was able to work with our team at Seattle Children's to navigate COVID and to make sure we've been able to take care of the patients in a timely fashion. It's been a challenge, but we've been successful.

**SS: Do you have a personal goal for this year?**

**MM:** Well, my personal goal is the same as it's been for the last 10 years—to exercise more. I want to exercise more to be healthier. And as we get older it's harder to do things unless we are healthy.

**SS: What do you like to do in your leisure time?**

**MM:** I enjoy spending time with my family and playing music. We like to crab and we have a small oyster farm. I've had the farm for three years and had my first oyster harvest about a month ago. It was amazing. It's the first time I've actually been able to grow an oyster and eat it. I also enjoy reading.

**SS: Do you have favorite authors?**

**MM:** I like John Steinbeck. I think he's fantastic. Another author I really like is Haruki Murakami—two of his books in particular. "1Q84" which has a pseudoscience fictional storyline, and "Norwegian Wood," which is a Japanese coming of age novel— sort of like a "Catcher in the Rye" theme.

**SS: Do you have any guilty pleasures?**

**MM:** I have been known to sit down and binge watch "Breaking Bad" from 6:00PM until 6:00AM. I've seen the complete series a few times and I love it. It's written so well—almost like a Steinbeck novel. The characters are amazing, which is why I could sit for 12 hours eating Doritos with a cold drink while watching it.

**SS: What was your favorite educational experience?**

**MM:** Without question my favorite educational experience was high school. I went to a Jesuit high school and despite my many years of higher education, my high school education was the best.



Nice catch off Camano Island

The most enjoyable educational experience was probably my time in Melbourne, Australia, where I did my congenital cardiac surgery training. The country is fantastic and the people are wonderful. Melbourne is a lovely city with great food and just a nice vibe. The hospital where I trained was great and the people I worked with were truly some of the best people in the world at what they do. I am deeply indebted to them for what I learned. In fact, there's no way I could do what I'm doing now-- I mean, they trained me not just to be a heart surgeon, but also to be able to be in my current position.

**SS: What's your biggest pet peeve?**

**MM:** The thing I dislike the most are people who are intellectually or emotionally dishonest. It's something I've never been able to understand, and it irritates me to no end. My biggest pet peeve in my daily work is a scrub nurse that looks away from the OR table. It drives me bonkers and everyone knows it.

**SS: What is an interesting fact about yourself that many people don't know?**

**MM:** All in the same year, I personally met the Queen of England, Laura Bush (who was First Lady at the time) when they visited Children National Medical Center (where I previously worked) and the Princess of Thailand at a medical conference I was attending. I also shook hands with Pope John Paul II. You know I hate liars, but the only way I was able to shake hands with him was by convincing the Papal Guard I was Hungarian so that I could get into a part of St. Peter's Basilica at the right time. He had very soft hands.