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## XiMED Board Member and Pulmonologist Dr. Scott McCaul Happy with Career as Independent Physician

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Posted: Tuesday, July 14, 2015 10:30 am

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Scott McCaul, MD

Scott McCaul, MD, breathes fresh air into the lives of his patients as he practices his pulmonary medical specialty while serving as a member of the XiMED medical board, a position he has held since 2013. In addition to his direct practice responsibilities, he has served on the XiMED hospitalist board since 2006, acted as medical director of the critical care units at Scripps Memorial Hospital since 1995, and is a member of the hospital's medical executive committee, an affiliation he established in 2006.

Upon completing a fellowship in pulmonary medicine at Tulane Medical Center Hospital in 1987, Dr. McCaul began to look for a job. Convincing his wife that "there were no job opportunities other than in San Diego," he sorted through several offers and quickly found himself working with a group of pulmonologists at Scripps Memorial. He has maintained his relationship with the group and since 2006 has acted as president of La Jolla Pulmonary and Critical Care Inc.

Asked how he became a doctor, Dr. McCaul says, "I evolved into it. There are no other physicians in my family. I was in my 20s before I decided to attempt to go to medical school." He was well equipped to study medicine, having completed an undergraduate degree in biochemistry at Tulane University graduating magna cum laude.

However, throughout his medical education he was undecided about whether to pursue a career in clinical medicine or academic research. Dr. McCaul liked the "problem-solving" aspects of medicine and saw a career as a physician as a "real opportunity to pursue diverse interests."

However, he was almost finished with his medical training before he made the final decision about his career. "It wasn't until I was in my fellowship that I decided to commit to clinical medicine," he says of his decision to pursue a career in private practice as an independent physician.

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## been practicing medicine for years, and we recognize what excellence is and we strive for it.

Today, he divides his time between his office-based outpatient practice and his intensive care work at Scripps Memorial.

In the hospital setting his work focuses on his role as a pulmonary intensivist. "Basically, I support patients through complex procedures and life-threatening illness. Participating in stroke and cardiac interventions has been particularly gratifying." Scripps Memorial has become a Comprehensive Stroke Center and one of the first stroke centers nationwide to be so designated

by The Joint Commission. The Cardiovascular institute is capable of providing the most advanced interventions in the management of heart disease.

Asked about his experience as a physician, he says if he had a chance he would do it all over again. "I have enjoyed the entire process of developing expertise," he says of his training and subsequent clinical experience. "It is a very gratifying profession. It is the ability to practice with expert and evolving providers that has maintained my interest and prevented burnout."

However, the profession is not without significant complexities. "Trying to understand the financial and business aspects of medicine" has been an "illuminating surprise," he says. "There is constant experimentation around how to spend the healthcare dollar. As an independent physician I rely on my professional relationships and XiMED to stay ahead of the competition." One of many areas of concern to Dr. McCaul is continuity of care as patients are moved through the healthcare system. He believes that better outcomes are possible if care can be provided across transitions as if the patient never left their home.

"Establishing systematic ways of transmitting information, diagnoses and therapeutic interventions in such a way that the patient owns the results and data would go a long way to end the disruption and delay in care created by transitions from office to hospital and to home."

In contrast to the hospital setting, Dr. McCaul notes that delivering healthcare in the outpatient setting can be more difficult. "In the hospital there is a sense of immediate need and desire for efficiency," he observes. "Approvals and denials don't shape the hospital experience as often."

In the office setting, the authorization process can "add a week or two" to treatment, potentially with "catastrophic effects," he says. "It would seem that in order to spend less, routine denials are dispensed by the payers, very often not in the patient's interest."

When asked to describe his most significant challenge, Dr. McCaul quickly goes to the heart of the matter — "the business of medicine," he says. "Hospitals have little awareness of how much it costs to provide a service. It is very difficult to measure outcomes and how much was spent to produce an outcome," he notes. "Very frustrating." One of the positive changes in contemporary medicine Dr. McCaul notes is "recognition of the team approach to managing a patient ... a cooperative way of managing the patient and determining which patients are at greatest risk."

Regarding XiMED, Dr. McCaul notes that "generations of physicians have worked within XiMED. We know how to communicate immediately. As an entity we take better care of patients. Simply said, we have been practicing medicine for years, we recognize what excellence is, and we strive for it."

Dr. McCaul is an unabashed supporter of the independent physician. "There is huge value in the independent physician," he says, with "adaptability" among their most important skills. Reflecting on his experience and the future of medicine, Dr. McCaul says, "I wish I could live longer ... I would love to see what is next in the practice of medicine, which, though evolving slowly, has really improved."

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