



Guest Editorial

Is there a life after a career as an orthopedic surgeon?

Merv Letts MD, MSc, FRCS(C)¹

¹Department of Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada.

*Corresponding author:

Merv Letts,
66-261 Botanica Private,
Ottawa, ON, K1Y 4P9, Canada.

letmer13@gmail.com

Received: 23 April 2023
Accepted: 23 April 2023
Epub Ahead of Print: 29 April 2023
Published: 06 May 2023

DOI

10.25259/JMSR_84_2023

Quick Response Code:



Although criteria vary in various hospitals, cities, and countries ultimately, we all will face retirement at some point in our careers! How we cope with disengaging from a life of assisting our fellow man through repairing a myriad of deformities, reconstructing horrendous traumatic injuries and facilitating ambulation will vary amongst us. Still, we can prepare for this inevitable event. The Royal “we” is used here to reflect the importance of including our spouses or significant others in our decision-making for retirement.

Some of us may wish to transition gradually to retirement by electing to practice “office orthopedics,” leaving the surgery, night work, and on-call to younger colleagues. Others (like myself) may prefer to share our expertise with international colleagues in foreign lands in the twilight of our careers. As an example, I departed at the age of 60 as Head of Pediatric Surgery at the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa, Canada, to work as a pediatric orthopedic surgeon at the Sheikh Khalifa Medical Centre in Abu Dhabi, UAE, for 6 years. During this time, assistance in training residents was provided, as well as facilitating postgraduate training for them in North America. It was also possible to introduce new techniques to the staff in fields such as spinal surgery and repair of congenital hip dislocation, both of which were prevalent in the UAE. Providing new expertise to another part of the world is a very rewarding experience and it adds immensely to one’s feelings of orthopedic accomplishments. My wife Marilyn also enjoyed volunteering and living in a different country and climate with similar positive feelings that we were helping the country to excel. For both of us, it was a deep but pleasant cultural experience and we made many friends from diverse cultures that we still are in contact with today!

The freedom of retirement provides an opportunity to author non-orthopedic books based on your life stories, which we all have! Although I have written several orthopedic texts, it was an absolute joy to author three books from my life experiences, “Flashbacks of a Prairie Kid” (having grown up on the Canadian prairie); “Sinai Surgeon” (based on my year as a Peacekeeping Military Physician at royal Canadian air force [RCAF] Stn El Arish in the Sinai), and “Flashbacks of a Pedi Pod” (interesting stories and events during my time as a pediatric orthopedic surgeon). Although none were in the best-seller category, they were fun to write, reminisce, and remember life’s joys!

Retirement also opens up time for one to participate in favored committees, organizations, or events that were an impossibility during a busy orthopedic practice! As an example, shortly after my retirement, I served for 5 years on the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons complaints committee, which entailed many trips from Ottawa to Toronto. Post-retirement, I also joined the Rotary Club of West Ottawa. Such commitments should, of course, be entirely your choice, for in retirement, you no longer have an obligation to serve.

How to cite this article: Letts M. Is there a life after a career as an orthopedic surgeon? J Musculoskelet Surg Res, 2023;7:71-2.

Your non-orthopedic skills, such as music, sports, and hobbies, can all be enhanced by retirement. Many of us had music skills developed in our teens that remained nascent during our pursuit of medicine and orthopedic surgery. These can be brought back to life! In my teens, I played clarinet and trumpet in a band but had hardly touched the instruments during my medical years until retirement! I dug out my instruments and music and started to play. It took me a few months to get up to speed, but my playing actually improved, and I still derive much joy from playing. The same holds true for hobbies that were placed on the back burner. For me, that included stamp collecting, of which I was an avid collector. The album came out of storage, and my Canadian premier collection has now been brought up to scratch, and I have started a new Middle East collection.

As orthopedic surgeons, we have made immense progress in addressing sports injuries, but when it comes to actually participating in sports, we are at the lower end of the curve with sporadic actual involvement. In retirement, a new vista opened up! time and inclination to actually participate in sports! In college, I was a good table tennis player in retirement; I became an excellent player even recruited by a table tennis club! I also revived my interest in lawn tennis and golf (the latter also improved immensely). A corollary to this increased sport participation is that not only did it allow new friends to be made it also provided just what the doctor

ordered regular exercise!! As well, my wife could join me in these events and since she is a much better golfer than I, she greatly enhances my golf score!

We are in the age of technology, and we must learn to use it to the fullest. With a little preparation, the ZOOM can be used to get together with friends all over the world! As an example each week, I have a 1-h ZOOM meeting with five friends I trained with in the RCAF. in Boston, Mexico, and across Canada. This is available to all of us and will soon be augmented by Artificial Intelligence we need to take advantage of these communication facilitators!

Finally, traveling with one's wife and family is a blessing in retirement, that is, not having to worry about a paper presentation, attending a lecture, or finding the meeting site just enjoy the view and the day! It is also an opportunity to get to know your grandchildren better by taking them on an outing. We took our first cruise out of Stockholm on the Baltic Sea (just before the Russo/Ukrainian war), and it was superb!

In conclusion, I hope some of these personal experiences will help you in your retirement planning or enhance your retirement if you are already there! Do not think of retirement as the ending of one's career but rather the beginning of a new exciting one! As CS Lewis once said, "You are never too old to set a new goal or dream a new dream!"