A Passion for Children's Health: Dr. Ghishan Celebrates 20 Years at UA

UA Department of Pediatrics and Steele Children's Research Center
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Those who know Dr. Fayez K. Ghishan say he is one of the most passionate advocates for children's health they have ever met.

The physician's dedication to making a positive impact on children's health is evident in the animated way he speaks about research; in the compassion he shows his patients, greeting each one with a warm smile and a gentle hug; the guidance he gives to medical students, residents, fellows and doctoral candidates; and the stirring speeches he delivers to donors, volunteers, fundraising events and the community.

Ghishan, professor and head of the UA Department of Pediatrics, director of the UA Steele Children's Research Center and physician-in-chief at Banner Children's at Diamond Children's Medical Center, recently celebrated his 20-year anniversary at the UA, and more than 40 years in medicine.

"We are so proud of Dr. Ghishan," said Peggy Rowley, advisory board president for the UA Steele Center and co-chair of the Oct. 16 "I Think I Can" gala fundraiser to benefit the Steele Center and Diamond Children's. "When he asks us to support research, he is passionate. When he tells us he must leave a meeting because he has patients, we see the compassion and concern in his eyes. He is an amazing administrator, fundraiser, researcher and physician. His energy comes from one place ? his heart."

"I'm as passionate about improving children's health now as I was when I started my career," Ghishan said. "This has been quite the journey."

Ghishan's journey started in Jordan, where he was born. The oldest of nine siblings, Ghishan credits his mother with instilling in him a desire to pursue medicine.

"There were only two doctors in our town and my mom spoke fervently about how important doctors were to a community's health," he said. "In fact, she encouraged me to become a physician so I could help my community."

The idea his mother planted ? that he could positively impact his community ? took root and grew. It has motivated Ghishan ever since.

"By the time I was 7, I knew I wanted to be a doctor," he recalled. A photo of Ghishan when he was about that age shows him wearing a formal white jacket, a tie and carrying a leather briefcase.

When Ghishan was just 16, he attended medical school at Ankara University in Turkey. He then went to the Royal Cornwall Hospital in England to pursue pediatrics. Upon completion,
he returned to Jordan and worked as a general pediatrician for five years.

But something was missing.

"I saw so many children with GI problems, and many died. It was heartbreaking. I wanted to make a bigger impact, so I decided to come to the U.S. for training in pediatric gastroenterology," he said.

Ghishan attended Penn State University and completed a residency in pediatrics. Next, he went to the University of Iowa to complete a fellowship in pediatric gastroenterology.

"My mentor at Iowa sparked in me a love of science," he said. "It was through research I discovered I could have the greatest long-term impact on children's health."

In 1979, Ghishan joined Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. There, his scientific career flourished.

"Vanderbilt gave me the tools of research ? in molecular biology, molecular cloning and gene regulation," he said.

In 1995, Ghishan was recruited to the UA as professor and head of the UA Department of Pediatrics and director of the UA Steele Children's Research Center. He is considered one of the UA's most prolific clinicians, enthusiastic teachers and productive scientists. In 2011, he was named physician-in-chief of Banner Children's at Diamond Children's Medical Center.

Patients and families adore Ghishan.

"When Dr. Ghishan is your doctor, you know your child will be cared for in every possible way," said Erin Achilles, whose son Gavin, now 10, has been Ghishan's patient since infancy. "Dr. Ghishan's knowledge is powerful, his words comforting, and his compassion and passion for his patients is amazing."

"Dr. Ghishan's level of knowledge, wisdom and scientific inquiry is unparalleled," said Ellen Bublick, Dan B. Dobbs Professor of Law in the UA James E. Rogers College of Law. "I'm so grateful that he has been guiding my kids to such good health. There is no way they would be half as healthy as they are without Dr. Ghishan as their doctor."

In 2010, a longtime dream of Ghishan's was realized with the opening of Diamond Children's.

"I'm so proud of this accomplishment," he said. "Thanks to the support from the Diamond family and countless others, Tucson has the only pediatric academic medical center in Arizona."

Ghishan is equally as passionate about research. He lights up a room with his enthusiasm as he talks about science and its impact on children's health.

At the recent Hyundai Hope on Wheels ceremony, where the UA Steele Center received $400,000 for pediatric cancer research, Ghishan spoke about the need for more research. Community supporter and philanthropist Jim Click, representing Jim Click Hyundai, attended.

"I'm so inspired by Dr. Ghishan," Click said. "I know he and his team work countless hours to discover a cure for pediatric cancer."
Ghishan's career has been marked by numerous achievements and awards. His research has been continuously funded by the National Institutes of Health for more than 30 years and he is internationally recognized for his contributions to the field of pediatric gastroenterology. He was the first to clone a human intestinal sodium-phosphate transporter gene and has extensively characterized the structure, function and regulation of a variety of other sodium-phosphate transporters. He has published more than 245 articles in peer-reviewed journals and more than 55 book chapters. He was the associate editor of the seminal textbook Physiology of the Gastrointestinal Tract, Volumes 1 and II, fourth and fifth editions.

"I love my life, I love my family and I'm grateful for the opportunities I've been given at the University of Arizona over the past 20 years ? to advance research, take care of children and teach the next generation of physicians and scientists," Ghishan said.

The "I Think I Can" fifth annual gala to support the UA Steele Children's Research Center and Banner Children's ? Diamond Children's Medical Center will take place on Oct. 16 at 6 p.m. at the Westin La Paloma Resort and Spa.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.steelecenter.arizona.edu/gala.

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