



**DERMATOLOGIC DISQUISITIONS AND OTHER ESSAYS**  
Edited by Philip R. Cohen, MD

# **Dermatologists with dual MD, JD degrees: a few comments on my life and those of other dermatologists with MD, JD degrees**

**Noah Scheinfeld, MD, JD\***

*Department of Dermatology, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, NY 10019, USA*

## **Introduction**

Why did I pursue a career in dermatology after earning my law degree...and why was I asked to write on this subject? I suppose, if you use Google as a metric, I am one of the dermatologists—who are also an attorney—who generates a tremendous number of hits (perhaps the second greatest following David Goldberg, MD, JD). I am also considered to be an expert in the area of law and dermatology; indeed, I write a column in *Skin and Aging* called Legalese. When I speak at national meetings, I am invited to speak about Law and Dermatology and not about psoriasis, acne, or the hedgehog gene.

## **My journey**

I was born into comfortable circumstances. My father was a bit of a prodigy. He had graduated from Yeshiva University at age 19 with top honors in history and economics, received rabbinical ordination from Yeshiva University from Rabbi Soloveichek, who headed the most exacting and prestigious board of ordination in the United States. His score on the law school admission's test was among the highest in the country, and he won a full scholarship (yes, once upon a time, they gave out full scholarships) to Harvard Law School. I always wanted to go to Harvard, if for no other

reason, I suppose, unconsciously, that it was to equal my father and not to have to hear how great Harvard was without being part of the Harvard mystique myself. My mother grew up in Brooklyn and at age 36, attended Brooklyn College, and earned a master's degree in social work at the New York School of Social Work. I have two brothers, both younger.

## **Why law?**

Why law? Well it was easier to go to law school, as it has no pre-requirements to apply. Law school seemed the more intellectual endeavor than medical school. I had many intellectual interests, and law seemed a good place for exploring them. Also, I likely felt that I had to match the achievements of my father.

## **Why medicine?**

Why medicine? Well, as a lawyer, I was, in a sense, in my father's shadow. Also, I suppose that I always wanted to wear a white hat while lawyers must wear what every hat and play whatever role their clients want. People become what they do, and the work, as a physician, I think if you want to help can make you a person whose words and deeds can both be positive and a boon to one's self and the world.

## **Why dermatology?**

I decided to become a dermatologist in the middle of my medical school training. While to the layperson this makes

\* Tel.: +1 212 991 6490.

E-mail address: [scheinfeld@earthlink.net](mailto:scheinfeld@earthlink.net).

**Table 1** Dermatologists with MD, JD Degrees

	Law School	Medical School	Residency	Current Location and/or Academic Affiliation if one exists with State and City	JD before MD	Fellowship/ Subspecialty
Julia Ai	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey School of Law, Newark, NJ	University of Medicine and Dentistry, New Jersey (Camden)	University of Miami School of Medicine, Miami, FL	NV	Dual	
Mathew M. Avram	Cornell University Law School, Ithaca, NY	Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA	Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, MA	Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA	Yes	Surgical
Robert Buka	Fordham University School of Law, New York, NY	Northwestern University School of Medicine, Chicago, IL	New York Medical College, Valhalla NY /University California San Diego, San Diego, CA	Mt Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY	Yes	Pediatric Dermatology
Rebecca B. Campen	University of Georgia School of Law, Athens, GA	Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA	Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA	Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA	No	
James S. Feinberg	John Marshall Law School, Chicago, IL	University of Illinois Chicago School of Medicine, Chicago, IL	University of Illinois Chicago School of Medicine, Chicago, IL	University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago, IL	No	
Connie Gibstine	Loyola University of Chicago School of Law, Chicago, IL	University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine, Columbia, MO	Northwestern University School of Medicine, Chicago, IL	MO	No	
David Goldberg	Fordham University School of Law, New York, NY	Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, CT	New York University School of Medicine, New York, NY	Mt Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY	No	Mohs
Daniel (Aires) Hurwitz	Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA	Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, CT	University of Texas Southwestern School of Medicine, Dallas, TX	University of Kansas School of Medicine, Kansas City, KS	Yes	Research
Clifford W. Lober	Barry University School of Law, Orlando, Florida	Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, NC	University of Tennessee School of Medicine, Memphis, TN	University of South Florida School of Medicine, Tampa, FL	No	
Steve Proper	Stetson University Law School, Tampa Bay, FL	University of Medicine and Dentistry, New Jersey, Newark, NJ	New York University School of Medicine, New York, NY	University of South Florida School of Medicine, Tampa, FL	No	Mohs
Paul T. Rose	Southern California University for Professional Studies, Santa Ana, CA	State University of New York (Downstate) School of Medicine, Brooklyn, NY	Temple University Skin and Cancer Hospital, Philadelphia, PA	FL	No	Mohs
Paul J. Ruschak	Duquesne University School of Law, Pittsburg, PA	Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA	Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA	PA	No	

Jonathan Sanders	University of Chicago Law School, Chicago, IL	University of Miami School of Medicine, Miami, FL	Boston University School of Medicine/Tufts University School of Medicine, Boston, MA	FL	Yes	
Allen Sapadin	Fordham University School of Law, New York, NY	Mt Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY	Mt Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY	Mt Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY	No	
Noah Scheinfeld	Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA	Yale School of Medicine University, New Haven, CT	Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, NY	Columbia University/ St Luke's Roosevelt Hospital Center, New York, NY	Yes	Pediatric Dermatology, Dermatopathology
Melissa W. Schwarzschild	University of Virginia School of Law, Charlottesville, VA	Medical College of Virginia/Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, VA	Medical College of Virginia/ Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA	VA	Yes	
Barry Solomon	University of Pennsylvania Law School, Philadelphia, PA	State University of New York (Downstate) School of Medicine, Brooklyn, NY	State University of New York (Downstate) School of Medicine, Brooklyn, NY	State University of New York (Downstate) School of Medicine, Brooklyn, NY	Yes	
Philip Strenger	Brooklyn Law School, Brooklyn, NY	University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburg, PA	New York University School of Medicine, New York, NY	NY	Yes	
Aloys Tauschek	University of Wisconsin at Madison Law School, Madison, Wisconsin	University of Wisconsin at Madison School of Medicine and Public Health, Madison, WI	University of Wisconsin at Madison, School of Medicine and Public Health, Madison, WI	University of Wisconsin at Madison, School of Medicine and Public Health, Madison, WI	No	
Abel Torres	Loyola Marymount University Law School, Los Angeles, CA	Mt Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY	New York University, School of Medicine, New York, NY	Loma Linda University School of Medicine, Loma Linda, CA	No	Mohs
Linda Wang	University of Chicago Law School Chicago, IL	Pritzker School of Medicine University of Chicago, Chicago, IL	Pritzker School of Medicine University of Chicago, Chicago, IL	Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA	Dual	
Richard Wagner	University of Houston Law School, Houston, TX	New York Medical College, Valhalla, NY	Tufts University School of Medicine /Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, MA	University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, TX	No	Mohs

This list is not definitive, it lists those JD MD whom I could identify. Physicians might not be in the locations that I identified.

sense, it is less and less the norm in dermatology. I have run across medical school applicants who are aspirants in dermatology, and I am regularly contacted by medical students who are assembling out the pieces that fit into a dermatology residency application form. Until the summer after my first year of medical school, I had never met a dermatologist. In my salad days in the 1970s, there was no Dr. 90210 or Dr. Nicholas Perricone to thrust dermatology into my consciousness. When I thought of medicine, I thought of ophthalmology, because the father of my closest friends was an ophthalmologist who dealt with the retina and used a laser. He was as intelligent, agile, and energetic, as anyone I knew.

All stories require narratives. As a first year student, I spent a good amount of time in a small group of students with Robert Donaldson Jr., who had been on the editorial board of the *New England Journal of Medicine* and deputy dean of Yale School of Medicine and acting Dean for one year. He was a stellar physician in all respects and despite his disbelief that I was leaving law for medicine, he was and always will be an inspiration for me. His was the reassuring hand that let me know that I could be a physician. I must explain that had I never gone to Yale School of Medicine, I likely would never have met any dermatologists in medical school, at all. Because of Yale School of Medicine, I was exposed to dermatology, both initially and obliquely. The medical school has no grades; at least it did not have first and second year grades in my time. It is hard for me to make out what has changed by reading the Dean's Letters of residency applicants but I understand that some type of tracking occurs. Yale School of Medicine also had a requirement for a medical school thesis topic. In searching for this topic, I found my way to dermatology.

And my hat is off to Sigura Imeda for recognizing my hard work and writing an impassioned letter of recommendation and to Ruth Halaban who was able to say something positive, although it was obvious I was not bound for bench work. Peter Heald apparently compared me to A. Bernard Ackerman in the recommendation that he wrote; I will leave it to those who know "Bernie" and me (and also Peter) to make sense of that comparison.

The possession of an MD, JD was a mixed blessing when I applied for a dermatology residency. Some dermatology residency programs, it seemed, liked "straight arrows," applicants who have gone immediately from a earning a BS in college straight away to getting an MD in medical school, and had no interest in me. Some dermatology programs want to train MD, PhD, trying—I think—to fulfill the fantasy that dermatologists can be practicing scientists. It seemed that the programs at Albert Einstein in the Bronx in the person of Steven Cohen and the Cleveland Clinic in the person of Charles Camisa were impressed by me. Vincent DeLeo, my chief when I worked at St Lukes-Roosevelt Medical Center in New York, insisted that he wanted to rank me highly on Columbia's rank list, but somehow I did not match there.

I received a position in a dermatology residency program at Einstein. In my opinion, the chairman of the program, Michael Fisher, is the greatest clinical dermatologist and teacher of clinical dermatology; however, I only came to appreciate this fact, when I was no longer a resident. Unfortunately, as a dermatology resident, I did not have an opportunity to do much in regards to law and dermatology. Yet, I did do a lot of work in the area of teledermatology, a field that I later analyzed from a medical legal standpoint.

## Golden opportunities

I wanted to stay at a hospital, when I graduated from my dermatology residency. I got a job at St Luke's Roosevelt Hospital Center, which was under the guidance of Vincent DeLeo. This turned out to be crucial for my later emergence as a national expert in law and dermatology. He was the President of the Dermatologic Society of Greater New York and had attendings from St. Luke's Roosevelt give lectures at meetings of the Society.

In 2003, I gave a lecture on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) at a meeting. Lance Brown heard that lecture; he said that he wrote for a publication called *Skin & Aging* and that the publication might be looking for someone to write about law and dermatology.

Shortly thereafter, I contacted Larisa Hubbs, the editor of *Skin & Aging*. My initial stories were on teledermatology and HIPAA. Subsequently, I wrote approximately 35 more articles on law and dermatology which are available for free on the website of *Skin & Aging*.

In 2004, I also published in the *Archives of Dermatology* an article entitled "Photographic images, digital imaging, dermatology, and the law," which I thought was an important explication of the legal framework that defines the place of digital photographs in the practice of medicine. This article has been cited 3 times and I leave it to the readers to look at the article, which is now also available for free, to see if they think it makes important points on the subject.

I gave the HIPAA lecture that I originally presented to the Dermatologic Society of Greater New York another half dozen times. One of these lectures was for Grand Rounds at Bronx Lebanon hospital, where my friend Donald Rudikoff was chief of dermatology. I recall how the head of the IRB tried to rattle me with unanswerable questions about the de-identification of the personal data of research data. I mentioned in my reply to her that this issue had not yet been defined in the regulations that defined the ambit of HIPAA. I also gave the lecture at the Mt Sinai School of Medicine, Winter Conference, where I spoke on legal and technology subjects annually between 2001 and 2006 and will again speak in 2008.

Law and dermatology has also put me on the evaluation circuit. In 2004, I began to give focus sessions on Law & Dermatology at the American Academy of Dermatology. I have given such law and dermatology focus sessions in addition to 2004-2008 with excellent speaker ratings scores.

In 2006 and 2007, I gave lectures at the New York University annual dermatology meeting.

I sometimes speak under the aegis of pharmaceutical companies about law and dermatology. My lectures contain information dermatologists would like to know; hence, the lectures include information on how to use the 'lingo' of management consultants in order to increase good will toward the company.

### Other dermatologists who have taken a similar voyage

It is interesting to look at the careers of others who have taken the MD, JD route. A recent article in the *Dermatology Online Journal* surveyed academic dermatologists and found that MD/PhD were over represented in academics.<sup>1</sup> In a similar spirit, I have compiled a list of board certified dermatologists who also have attended law school. The data are summarized in [Table 1](#); for purposes of consistency, I shall refer to these individuals as MD, JDs, although this may not reflect the order in which their degrees were earned.

### Personal encounters

I have met, worked, or heard of a few other MD, JD dermatologists. I personally know the work and person of David Goldberg, a member of the board of directors of the American Academy of Dermatology. My Harvard Law School and Yale School of Medicine classmate, Daniel (Aires) Hurwitz is Chairman of the Division of Dermatology at the University of Kansas Medical Center. Robert Buka is a certified in pediatric dermatology. I once met Jonathan Sanders who rhapsodized on his debates with Richard Epstein, an intellectual lion at the University of Chicago Law School. I know that Allen Sapadin, similar to me, has been a speaker at Mt Sinai School of Medicine's Annual Winter Meeting. I have read the papers of Abel Torres and met him once at an AAD focus group; he should be recognized as a leader in the field of law and dermatology. When I interviewed at Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, all of the interviewers commented how they thought Barry Solomon had been a really great resident who managed to transform intellectual scraps into indexed articles and letters. Julia Ai was the first Rutgers/Camden dual degree MD/JD. Currently, I know that the noted dermatopathologist Whitney High is attending law school in Colorado. Lastly, I have read and enjoyed Rebecca Campen's book "Going into Medical Practice." Also, Daniel Parish (the son of a friend and professional hero of mine, Larry Parish) will soon start a dermatology residency. Daniel attended Jefferson Medical School and the University of Pennsylvania Law School and worked as a US Attorney and has written almost 10 papers with me. Daniel was recently accepted into the Jefferson Dermatology Residency Program, where I wish him great success.

### Observations and comments

The estimated number of MD, JDs ranged between 1,500-6,000 in an article in the *AMA News* in 2002.<sup>2</sup> It seems as if all of the universities that have medical and law schools in close proximity to each other (Cornell is an example of a program not offering a joint degree due to geography) now offer dual MD, JD degrees. It would seem that the popularity of the joint degree is increasing, based on a Google search of these programs; moreover, many doctors report complications to their practicing of law.<sup>3</sup>

I have tried to identify certain trends in the data compiled relating to these MD, JDs. Interestingly, about one third of the dermatologist MD, JDs went to medical school after law school. This percentage is much higher than the typical MD, JD. The same article from the *AMA News* from 2002 noted: "[i]n most cases, physician-lawyers pursue their medical degrees first and then go back to get their law degrees after setting up practice."<sup>1</sup> This preponderance of MD first MD, JD is borne out on a website that lists MD, JDs.<sup>4</sup>

Of the dermatologist MD, JDs who went into medicine first, a substantial minority are Mohs surgeons. Richard Wagner, for example, specializes in Mohs and is a professor of dermatology, deputy chair, and director of dermatologic surgery at University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. Abel Torres is Chief of the Division of Dermatology and has been at Loma Linda University Medical Center in California since 1986; he is a Mohs surgeon also. Paul Rose is a hair and Mohs surgeon. Steve Proper and Clifford Lober both have rainbows of interests, many of them surgical.

At least one third of the MD, JD dermatologists have done a fellowship or have subspecialty certification beyond their board certification in dermatology, which would seem to be slightly higher than for MD dermatologists. This extra training suggests that MD, JD have a certain drive, curiosity, or restlessness that seems less pronounced than in MD only dermatologists. This does not make one better than the other; what it does make for is longer resumes.

If we assume 10% of dermatologists are in academics, the MD, JDs are more academically oriented than the average dermatologist. Linda Wang is Program Director for the Center for Cutaneous Oncology at the Dana-Farber/Brigham & Women's Cancer Center in Boston, where she is the Principal Investigator for the Merkel Cell Cancer database project. James Feinberg has an MPH and is Associate Professor of Clinical Dermatology Director of University of Illinois at Chicago Dermatology Center Section and Chief, Dermatology Section, Medicine Service, at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center. Mathew Avram is an expert on Laser & Cosmetics Center and is on staff at Harvard Medical School. In Florida, most MD, JDs seem not to be full time academics but simply have a range of academic interests.

MD, JD dermatologists seem to cluster at certain medical schools and centers. Yale School of Medicine, Mt. Sinai, Harvard each appear on the resumes of  $\geq 3$  MD, JDs. NYU, SUNY Downstate, NYMC, Fordham, UMDNJ and the

University of Chicago appear at least twice. Interesting, Johns Hopkins and Stanford appear no where in my table. It is of course possible I just could not find some MD, JD dermatologists.

## Conclusions

It is interesting to understand the rather rare choice to attend law school, medical school and dermatology residency. Those who have done so, I think unsurprisingly, seem accomplished and involved in a variety of tasks. My possession of an MD, JD has presented opportunities including: a column in *Skin and Aging* and an increase in professional visibility and involvement on editorial boards and advisory panels. My JD degree alone has not been the touchstone for my professional progression. I find in some way that my progression and success in academic dermatology has been like the attack of Napoleon at the battle of Austerlitz, an attack into a void leading to a certain triumph because so few of my colleagues are interested in academic dermatology.

I would conclude that I feel lucky to be a dermatologist and to have worked with the colleagues and patients whom I have found and who have found me. I hope and believe that G-d and the Universe have a plan for us that unfolds as we take each step forward and that every step is as important as the end of the path.

## References

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Noah S. Scheinfeld, JD, MD is Assistant Clinical Professor of Dermatology at Columbia University College and Assistant Attending at Beth Israel Medical Center and St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital Center, He is a graduate of Harvard Law School and Yale School of Medicine School of Medicine. He is board certified in dermatology and pediatric dermatology.

Dr. Scheinfeld is an editor for the Journal of Drugs and Dermatology, SKINmed, Cutis, Skin & Aging, the Dermatology Online Journal, the American Journal of Clinical Dermatology, and the Cortlandt Forum. He has authored or coauthored 150 peer-reviewed articles. He has written 40 chapters for eMedicine, and over 30 columns on law and dermatology for Skin & Aging. For the Cortlandt Forum, a publication for primary care doctors, he writes a column on dermatology look a likes. He has given 50 presentations on dermatology and legal topics in the last 5 years. He is a nationally recognized expert on psoriasis, hidradenitis suppurativa and Degos' disease.

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E-mail address: [mitehead@aol.com](mailto:mitehead@aol.com).