



Recognizing Outstanding Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants in Hampton Roads

Erin Elizabeth Lee, PA-C
Orthopaedic & Spine Center

Even before she graduated from college and enrolled in a physician's assistant program, Erin Lee had earned the title 'surgical assistant.' Her father, Dr. N. Ray Lee, is an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in Newport News, and she spent many teenage summers working with him. "I grew up around medicine, and knew I wanted that career," she says, "but I wasn't sure in what field until I got to college."

By the time she graduated from North Carolina State, she knew she wanted to pursue surgery. She chose the University of Alabama at Birmingham because it offered the only Master's surgical PA program in the country. She had particularly enjoyed her orthopaedics rotation, and when she learned that Dr. Mark McFarland at OSC was recruiting for a surgical assistant, she applied online. "I knew I wanted to come back to the Williamsburg area," she says, "and when I met Dr. McFarland, and saw the work he was doing with spine surgery patients, I was excited."

She's been with Dr. McFarland four and-a-half years, and maintains that same level of excitement about the work. "There's a lot of variety," she says. "I'm in the office two days a week, where I have my own clinic – follow up appointments, post injections after epidurals, usually 25 to 30 patients each day. One day a week, I assist with in-office procedures."

The other two days, she says, she's in surgery with Dr. McFarland. "I'm his first assistant, so I'm helping throughout the case, retracting, putting in screws, suturing and closing. The specialized spine surgery that Dr. McFarland does is very complex and exacting, and it can be stressful. A six-hour case isn't unusual."

Lee has a very effective stress reliever, however, that she's turned into a passion: "A couple of years

ago," she says, "I started running to get in shape." She decided she wanted to run some races, but wasn't sure it would be feasible given her surgical schedule. She tried a half-marathon (13.1 miles), which just whetted her appetite for the full 26.2-mile experience of a full marathon. Not sure about how to train for the longer run, she learned about a group called Team In Training (TNT), which coaches people to run both half and full marathons. "In exchange for their professional training," Lee says, "runners agree to raise funds for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society."

For Lee, that was a no-brainer. She had lost a close friend to a very rare and devastating form of cancer. "When I found out about Team In Training, I thought it was a wonderful way to give back and honor her at the same time," she says. "I started racing in her name." Her initial fundraising goal was \$1,600, but she didn't stop there. She also collected more than fifteen hundred pounds of gently used tennis shoes.

So far, she's competed five half marathons – and one full. She's currently training for the Nike San Francisco Half Marathon in October, and TNT has asked her to serve as Assistant Run/Walk Coach for the Hampton Roads area.

To help her fundraising goal for the Nike run, she's coordinating an event at OSC's new physical therapy building. "It's a 24-hour charity run," she says. "From 5pm on Friday, August 22nd, 'til 5pm the next day, people can sign up for one hour on a treadmill. For each hour, they agree to raise \$100 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. There's more at <http://www.raceit.com/search/event.aspx?id=28039>."

For those without her stamina, Lee says, "They're welcome to come in groups of six and divide the run into 10-minute segments!"

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