Message From Our New Interim Chief Jason Hunt, MD

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate my mentor, friend and colleague, Clough Shelton, MD, on his upcoming retirement. I thank him for his many years of service that has created a division that fosters and exemplifies excellence in patient care, enhanced education and research productivity. His leadership and support has allowed for my own professional growth as it has for so many others. Over the years, he has expanded our expertise by recruiting extraordinary clinical and research talent. Our faculty, staff, and residents could not be more proud of his contributions to our field and healthcare system. Because of Dr. Shelton’s leadership and successes, the division is incredibly strong and filled with extremely talented individuals that will continue our mission and exceed all expectations.

It is my distinct honor to serve as the incoming Interim Chief of the Division of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery. I joined University of Utah Health in 2006 after completing a Head and Neck/Microvascular fellowship at Vanderbilt University following my Otolaryngology training at Louisiana State University in New Orleans. I have served as the Clinical Director for the Section of Head and Neck Surgical Oncology since 2007, during which time we have experienced the same strong growth as the rest of the division. I am pleased to be part of a nationally recognized, transformative healthcare system that delivers world-class care and a division and department that are nationally recognized. I look forward to furthering our mission of excellence in patient care, education, and research here at the University of Utah Health.

On behalf of the division and all of the University of Utah family, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Shelton for 17 wonderful years of patient care, innovation, and leadership.

Sincerely,

Jason P. Hunt, MD, FACS
Professor and Interim Chief of Otolaryngology
Head and Neck Surgery

Neil Patel, MD, is an Assistant Professor of Neurotology and Skull Base Surgery within the Division of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Utah. Dr. Patel completed both his fellowship in Otolaryngology and Skull Base Surgery and his residency training in Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He has a strong interest in the treatment of skull base tumors including vestibular schwannoma (acoustic neuroma), glomus jugulare, and cochlear implantation. With nearly 50 peer-reviewed publications, he has a particular interest in hearing preservation and maximizing quality of life.

He completed his undergraduate work in biomedical engineering at Duke University and went on to complete medical school at the University of Illinois, during which time he was inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society and Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. Dr. Patel’s clinical interests in otology/neurotology include skull base tumors, facial nerve tumors, cochlear implantation in adults and children, otosclerosis (stapes surgery), cerebropontal fluid leaks and encephaloceles, skull base bony dysplasia, middle ear disease including cholesteatoma, neurofibromatosis type 2, and ear and temporal bone cancer.

Sarah Drejet, MD, is an Assistant Professor of Head and Neck Surgical Oncology and Microvascular Reconstructive Surgery within the Division of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Utah. Dr. Drejet completed her fellowship training in Head and Neck and Microvascular Reconstructive Surgery under the instruction of Dr. James Netterville at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She completed her residency in Otolaryngology at Indiana University. Through her training, she has benefited from having passionate and supportive mentors and is excited to continue that tradition. She performs the breadth of head and neck surgical operations and has a strong interest in global health. She previously provided surgical support to hospitals in Africa and is now looking to establish international connections that will ultimately lead to programs training and supporting surgeons abroad.

She obtained an undergraduate degree in Integrative Biology from the University of California at Berkeley and went on to medical school at Jefferson Medical College (now Sidney Kimmel Medical College) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Sarah Drejet, MD
Assistant Professor Head and Neck Surgery

RESIDENTS
Ian Newbery, MD Pediatric Otolaryngology & Craniofacial at Washington University in St. Louis [WashU]
Brandon Cardon, MD joining Southern Utah ENT in St. George, Utah
Alana Aylward Head & Neck and Microvascular fellowship at Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC)

FELLOWS
Breanne Schiller, MD has accepted a Laryngology faculty position with University of Utah Health.
Quinn Orb, MD has accepted a Pediatric Otolaryngology faculty position with University of Utah Health.
Gabriel Dunya, MD We are still awaiting Dr. Dunya’s plans for the future.
Dr. Shelton’s with his mentor Howard P. House, MD, during his Fellowship at the House Hearing Clinic, Los Angeles the ultimate a teambuilding experience. Faculty meetings in my former office, three of us so small, we had our VA. The program was Medical Center, and the Primary Children’s at the University Hospital, residents per year that small program with two At that point, we were a University of Utah in 1994. has grown. I joined the much our organization remember fondly how future. When I recently reflections on the past and speculation on the pass rate of 100%. U.S. continuous accreditation, programs. the residency top 20 Otolaryngology the country’s top 20 Otolaryngology programs. We are beginning the process to become an independent department, which is a complex task that will take approximately 18 months. Guiding our transition to an independent department was the final task that I wished to complete as Chief. However, Mrs. Shelton is anxious for me to step down and get on with the next phase of our life. I know her well enough that I cannot put her off for 18 months. I had hoped to be the first chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of Utah. I now realize that will not happen, but I will be cheering from the sidelines.

I am confident that Dr. Jason Hunt will provide extraordinary leadership to our Division, and he will carry the Otolaryngology torch to the Department Finish Line. As a department, we have the potential to become one of the best programs in the country. I wish to thank you all for your contributions to develop our program to its current state. The 17 years as Chief have been the most fulfilling in my long career. It has been an honor to work with you, and we should all be very proud of our current program and optimistic about the future as a department.

News & World Report has ranked us in the top 50 programs four times since 2010. In 2017, we were recognized as one of the country’s top 20 Otolaryngology programs.
As COvID-19 spread to Utah, our faculty, staff and residents rallied and worked together. There was a lot of change, new information and uncertainty about the future, however as a group everyone stepped up in many ways to COvID-19. Kirk Hughes, the Director of Outpatient Services and University Hospital Administration did an outstanding job keeping everyone informed. In many ways, our faculty and staff have all become experts in the virtual visit world now! Give them any platform – Zoom, Telehealth and MyChart and they can do it!

Jacquie, who is a registered nurse that started with us in February 2020, was deployed to the COvID-19 units after 3 weeks and stayed there for about 4 months. Jaquie, RN, and lei, RN, have been steady volunteers on the weekends and days off, working in the COVID-19 testing centers through the hot summer months.

Jaquie, RN, lei, RN, Dennis, RN, Xochi, MA, John L, RN, and Kris, RN, have all volunteered and spent time in the Pre-COvID-19 testing centers. John, RN, volunteered to work almost a month without a day off, working the weekend COVID-19 vaccine clinic.

Lei, RN, currently is volunteering to oversee the University of Utah Pre-Covid-19 testing clinic amongst keeping current with clinic duties.

Dr. Marshall Smith did not miss one procedure week due to the critical nature of his patient’s airways.

Our faculty and staff first started with wearing PAPR’s for all patient visits with scope exams and even some ear exams in clinic. Currently, our faculty and staff are using N95’s comfortably and all the clinic exam rooms have HEPA filters. Additionally, we are pleased to be back to 90-100% capacity of patients seen.

Additionally, this year our division were able to welcome several new providers amongst all the chaos of the COvID-19 pandemic.

In some ways it was the slowest year but in others it flew by. By the time January 2021 came around all of our faculty, staff and residents had been vaccinated!

Thank you to our providers, staff and residents for all of your hard work and dedication!
ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Jeremy Meier and Dr. Richard Gurgel have completed their Triological Society Thesis and will be inducted as Fellows in the society during the 123rd annual COSM meeting.

Dr. Richard Gurgel was awarded the R21 “Do cochlear implants mitigate the risk of Alzheimer’s disease dementia and improve neuropsychological well-being in older adults?” This grant awarded to Dr. Gurgel (principal investigator) is focused on determining whether treating severe-profound hearing loss in older patients will protect them against Alzheimer’s disease dementia. The project brings together a multidisciplinary team with experts in population science, epidemiology, neurology, and biostatistics to answer questions about how hearing loss affects older adults. They will be utilizing the Utah Population Database, a unique resource in Utah that has data on over 11 million patients. Dr. Gurgel and his team hope to put together an analysis of the largest group of older cochlear implant patients ever studied. To learn more about this research, feel free to reach out to Dr. Gurgel directly at Richard.gurgel@hsc.utah.edu.

Dr. Michael Deans was awarded the R01 Grant titled “Mechanisms of PCP Signaling in Axon Guidance and Cochlear Innervation.” Type II spiral ganglion neurons innervate the outer hair cells of the cochlea and have nociceptive characteristics that enable them to detect hair cell loss or damage. This project will define developmental mechanisms guiding cochlear innervation by studying these type II neurons and the axon guidance events that turn their peripheral axons towards the cochlear base in order to contact multiple outer hair cells. Understanding these developmental mechanisms is necessary for the repair of auditory circuits following acoustic trauma and to promote cochlear re-innervation during the course of regeneration-based deafness therapy. Julie Barkmeier-Kraemer, PhD has made valuable contributions to the American Speech-Hearing Association (ASHA) during her service as Editor in Chief of the ASJSLP journal from 2018 until 2020. Julie’s commitment in serving the association has aided and advanced the profession. Members, like Julie, are the pillar of the association and have contributed significantly to the professional growth and stature of ASHA.

Dr. Eric Cerrati has been recognized for his specialized expertise in the field of cosmetic and reconstructive surgery. The Park City, Utah community recently voted for Dr. Eric Cerrati as one of the city’s Best Plastic Surgeons in the local magazine’s 2020 People’s Choice edition. Dr. Eric Cerrati is a double board-certified facial plastic surgeon and a well-respected specialist in the field of cosmetic plastic and reconstructive surgery. As a plastic surgeon who focuses on the face and neck, Dr. Cerrati uses the most advanced and cutting-edge techniques to provide long-lasting, elegant results.

DIVISION OF OTOLARYNGOLOGY - HEAD & NECK SURGERY

The University of Utah’s Division of Otolaryngology is committed to the exceptional treatment of hearing loss, sinus, and allergy problems, cancer tumors, voice disorders, and facial plastic reconstruction in both adults and children. Our physicians treat those who experience disease and pain in the ear, nose, and throat. We seek to help people hear again, correct birth defects, reestablish comfortable breathing, rehabilitate facial paralysis, improve overall quality of life, and save the lives of those who suffer from head and neck tumors and related conditions. Our dedication to constant improvement will continue to bring hope to those who suffer from these conditions.

Schedule a General Otolaryngology appointment: Call 801-587-8368
Schedule a Facial Plastic Surgery Otolaryngology appointment: Call 801-587-2173
Pediatric Otolaryngology/Ent: Call 801-662-1740
Head & Neck Cancer: Call 801-587-7000