



PRESS RELEASE

A New Face and a New Direction for UNM Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

New Division Chief brings cutting-edge techniques to make people whole again

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 3, 2013 — Albuquerque, NM (UNM Cancer Center) — Christopher Demas, MD, helps people put their bodies and their lives back together after dealing with devastating situations. His career has spanned over 30 years and five states and he is now bringing his caring and expertise to New Mexico. Dr. Demas is a newly hired University of New Mexico Professor of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. He is also the new Chief of the Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in the Department of Surgery at the UNM School of Medicine. He practices at UNM Hospital and UNM Cancer Center. One of his specialties is breast reconstruction after cancer treatment.

“I chose plastic surgery because of the ability to be totally creative day-to-day,” he explains. “When you’re faced with a complicated situation, you have to be very creative, very thoughtful.” Dr. Demas relies on his creativity a lot. While he uses time-tested techniques and known best practices, he must still apply them to each person’s situation with extreme thought and care.

One technique Dr. Demas brings to New Mexico is microsurgical flap surgery. Blood vessels and nerves run throughout tissues in the body. So, moving a piece of skin and muscle to reconstruct a breast can create a lot of donor site damage. With the help of a surgical microscope, Dr. Demas teases the blood vessels and nerves from tissue before transplanting it. Sometimes, he carefully moves the blood vessels with the transplanted flap tissue so that it has a blood supply in its new place. In those cases, he must also delicately sew the grafted blood vessels to existing blood vessels.

Fat grafting is another technique Dr. Demas brings. At first, the thought of moving fat from a less desirable location in the body to a more desirable one seems easy. Fat cells don’t appear to do much, after all. But like all cells, fat cells need a blood supply and supporting tissue called stroma. So when reconstructing a breast from fat injections only, Dr. Demas will obtain the best results if he can first stimulate the blood vessels and stroma to nourish the fat cells before injecting them. He can use one of several non-surgical techniques to create this cellular framework and must match the technique to the individual. Creating the bodily infrastructure and injecting fat cells into it requires a phased approach, though, and insurance won’t cover all aspects of these newest techniques for fat grafting. But the fat injections are out-patient procedures so they’re less costly than a one-operation breast reconstruction. And, as Dr. Demas explains, “the patient can go out to dinner that night.”

Microsurgical and fat grafting techniques can have beautiful results, especially when paired with skin and nipple sparing breast surgery. Dr. Demas is looking forward to working with Anna Voltura, MD, who will join the UNM Cancer Center in September. She specializes in nipple-sparing breast surgery. Both will join the breast cancer treatment team at the UNM Cancer Center which tailors treatment for each of its breast cancer patients.

As Division Chief, Dr. Demas plans to expand the faculty in the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Division. He plans to recruit a surgeon to work with the Burn Unit and a hand surgeon trained in microsurgery to work jointly with the Orthopedics Division. He would also like to start a residency program. The program would train new surgeons and would also enable the Division to engage more with the community. “Everywhere I’ve been—Dartmouth, Duke, New York City, Arizona—residents spent time with private practice surgeons in the community,” he says. “It’s an important experience.”

With a division to grow and new surgical techniques to introduce, Dr. Demas will have ample opportunity to apply his creativity. He’s looking forward to the work. “Reconstruction is where I get the most reward,” he says. “Saving legs, saving faces, reconstructing breasts—it’s very enjoyable. Every day is rewarding.”

About the UNM Cancer Center

The UNM Cancer Center is the Official Cancer Center of New Mexico and the only National Cancer Institute-designated Cancer Center in the state. One of just 68 premier NCI-Designated Cancer Centers nationwide, the UNM Cancer Center is recognized for its scientific excellence, contributions to cancer research, the delivery of high quality, state of the art cancer diagnosis and treatment to all New Mexicans, and its community outreach programs statewide. Annual federal and private funding of over \$72 million supports the UNM Cancer Center’s research programs. The UNM Cancer Center treats more than 60 percent of the adults and virtually all of the children in New Mexico affected by cancer, from every county in the state. It is home to New Mexico’s largest team of board-certified oncology physicians and research scientists, representing every cancer specialty and hailing from prestigious institutions such as M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Johns Hopkins University, and the Mayo Clinic. Through its partnership with Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces, the UNM Cancer Center brings world-class cancer care to the southern part of the state; its collaborative clinical programs in Santa Fe and Farmington serve northern New Mexico and it is developing new collaborative programs in Alamogordo and in Roswell/Carlsbad. The UNM Cancer Center also supports several community outreach programs to make cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment available to every New Mexican. Learn more at www.cancer.unm.edu.

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