

Brian Palafox, MD, Cardiothoracic Surgeon

Q. What are OCTCS' strengths?

A. We do all means of lung surgery and are the only group in Orange County doing pediatric heart and lungs. Along with robotic lung surgery, CABG and valve repairs, we do a high volume of radiofrequency ablations and transcatheter vascularization with robotic laser in conjunction with electrophysiology. We do more aneurysm surgeries here than at the university. We're the only ones in the area doing esophageal surgery for cancer through the chest. Dr. (Richard) Gates and I are also gearing up to do percutaneous valve surgery in conjunction with cardiology.

What are the best-kept secrets about St. Joseph Hospital?

The specialists. We excel in all fields with great depth and have checks and balances in each area. Also, we have so many conferences that involve nurses, physicians and all other involved specialties. A case in point is Lung Cancer, with conferences for pulmonologists, oncologists, surgeons, internists, pathologists, respiratory therapists and clinical nurses. It's led to better continuity of care.

Having served in Iraq, do you find news from the region accurate?

No. What's going on is underreported and I believe the death reports are inflated. You don't hear about the help in the schools, building water plants or healthcare programs.

What did you enjoy most about that experience?

The camaraderie and bonding between soldiers, and seeing the surgical team and soldiers adapt in this very different environment.

What impressed you most from your medical mission to India in January?

I was really amazed at how much the doctors there could accomplish with so little. They do not waste a thing. They save sutures that have been used, re-sterilize them and use them on another case. None of the doctors complain about this or that widget/gizmo. The surgeons take what they are handed and do what needs to be done.

What advice would you give to new practitioners?

Listen to the patient – they can tell their story better than most tests. Also, do volunteer work in a third-world country where you have to depend on your senses and you see how your skill set adapts without all the fancy widgets. Take time off and see the world.



Dr. Palafox is board certified in general and thoracic surgery and has practiced in Orange County for 26 years. He first joined the practice of Dr. Allen Gazzaniga in suite 502 of the Providence building at 1310 W. Steward Dr. When Dr. Gazzaniga retired in 1999, Dr. Palafox moved next door to suite 503 to join OCTCS, the county's largest heart group.

A Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves, Dr. Palafox was sent to Iraq in 2007, serving in Baghdad, Tikrit and Kirkuk. While there he gave surgical grand rounds three times at Sadaam General Hospital. On the night of July 3 his unit took a direct hit and 9 members of his 20-man team were injured. He was fortunate to escape injury.

Dr. Palafox has traveled to impoverished areas around the world on medical missions. He also enjoys tennis and competitive shooting with pistols, rifles and archery.

Physicians who would like to be featured in future issues of the *Medical Staff Briefs* are encouraged to call (714) 744-8559 or email marketing@stjoe.org.



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