

Pavan Grover, MD '89: Spine Specialist and Filmmaker

Pavan Grover, MD '89, has two passions: medicine and movies. An unlikely pairing, perhaps, but he succeeds in melding them so that each enhances his enjoyment of the other. “Both are part of who I am,” says Dr. Grover, an anesthesiologist and interventional spine specialist. “My artistic side allows me to step outside myself, but medicine will always come first.”

Dr. Grover was 6 years old when his family moved to New Jersey from New Delhi. He immersed himself in making home videos; he even starred as Batman with his younger brother, Sandeep, as Robin. Later, after the family moved to Houston, Dr. Grover returned to New Jersey and earned his undergraduate degree in the premed program at Rutgers University. He subsequently graduated from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School with honors in surgery and family medicine. The brothers were reunited when Dr. Grover returned to Houston for his residency in anesthesiology at the University of Texas Medical School.

BY KATE O'NEILL

In his third year of residency, everything changed. Responding to a “code blue,” he found that the patient in cardiac arrest was Sandeep. Nothing could be done; his brother died in his arms. “It was heartbreaking,” he says. “I will never get over breaking the news to my parents, but I believe the experience helped me as a physician to know intimately what patients and families experience.”

Dr. Grover turned to screenwriting as both a distraction and a solace, creating a screenplay, *Lazarus Rising*, on a mystical subject—the story of a doctor exploring the possibility of life after death.

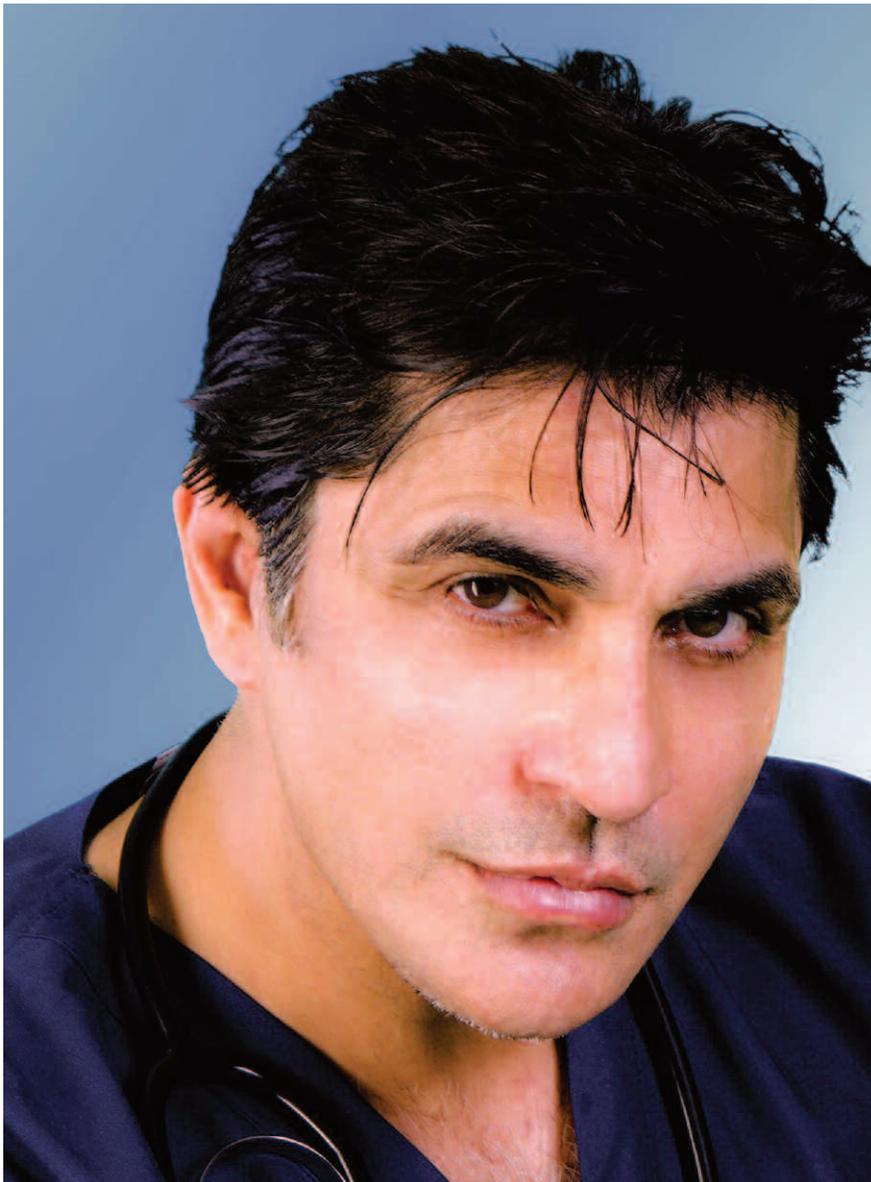
To develop experience in film production, he wrote a thriller, *Unspeak-*

able, which was later produced with Dennis Hopper costarring and Dr. Grover playing a central role as a psychopath on death row. More work on films followed, including as an executive producer on an adaptation of novelist Dean Koontz's best-selling series, *Odd Thomas*, and an actor in *Mr. Hell*.

Dr. Grover finds that film has made him a more empathetic physician. “With acting, writing, or any intense creative activity, you have to be totally in the moment,” he says. “Acting has sharpened my focus not just on my patients' words but also on their presentation. Art deepens empathy. It helps me find the best way to explain the problem and how we'll tackle it.”

Meanwhile, in 1993, following his residency, Dr. Grover completed an interventional pain fellowship in Sydney, Australia, with the late Michael Cousins, MD, widely considered to be the father of interventional pain management. Working closely with Dr. Cousins, Dr. Grover mastered the technique of healing pain with what Dr. Cousins called regional neural blockades.

In Dr. Grover's Houston-based solo practice, Inovospine, he applies Dr. Cousins's regional nerve-blocking techniques to “diagnostic mapping,” his



COURTESY OF PAVAN GROVER, MD '89

own approach to accurately diagnosing the exact source of a patient's pain.

As an example of the technique, Dr. Grover describes the case of a professional baseball pitcher he treated for chronic pain. "Prior treatments had focused on a diagnosis of a bulging disk, based on his X-rays," he says. "But once we mapped out the true source of his pain by selectively blocking different possible pain triggers and seeing the subsequent response in his pain level, we were able to perform a minimally invasive procedure to treat the exact problem. The treatment reversed the years of compensation and imbalance that were throwing off his form, and afterward, the force and accuracy

of his pitches dramatically improved."

He models the team-based approach in his clinical practice on the respectful environment that he experienced and valued at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "Everyone counts: the physician is no more important than the nurse or the person who shows the patient into the exam room," he says.

An ardent advocate for patient rights and education, Dr. Grover has served for more than 20 years as a medical commentator on networks including CNN, NBC, CBS, PBS, and Fox, addressing a wide range of topics. In 1994, he appeared on *Larry King Live* to debate the use of assisted suicide; he intervened in the case of a patient with

chronic, excruciating pain, caused by cancer, who had been consulting with Jack Kevorkian, MD, to end the pain through assisted suicide. Dr. Grover offered an alternative that the patient agreed to try. In an advanced procedure, he implanted an anesthesia pump directly into the patient's spine, and that succeeded in providing the patient with an additional two and a half years of life, pain-free.

In 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Grover volunteered with a medical triage team at the Houston Astrodome, caring for evacuees from New Orleans. Less than a year later, following a devastating earthquake in Pakistan, Dr. Grover temporarily closed his office and set out alone to help. The photographs he sent back to CNN prompted the network to assign a team that would produce a special report on the disaster. Because of his work in Pakistan, Dr. Grover received the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce of Houston in 2006.

"The people I've helped have brought me much more than I brought them," he says. "I was born in India, so I know about karma; I know that it comes back to you in many ways." **M**

Huda Sayed, MD '11:**A Second Home at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School***—Continued from page 39*

not want her to leave! Everyone looked up to her there. She is an inspiration of what a doctor should be. She never rushes and takes time with every patient.”

Dr. Sayed still stays in touch with peers and mentors from BCP and the medical school. A BCP alumna helped connect her to Emory, and Dr. Khan remains a close mentor—he even officiated her marriage. And one of her fel-

low alumni, Kristen Kenan-Tate, MD '11, is the godmother of her daughter.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in Rutgers and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School programs,” she says. “Medicine is not a right, it’s a privilege, and I feel lucky to have earned the privilege to care for others.” **M**

James Metz, MD '95:**Beaming into Medical History***—Continued from page 41*

as a grassroots effort, it was the first cancer website in the world—and it even preceded Yahoo. Dr. Metz began working on the website in 1996, during his residency training, and moved into the editor-in-chief’s role in 2000. The idea was to get information out to thousands of people around the world in a way that was appropriate for both medically naive and clinically savvy audiences. The site isn’t segmented—there are no specialized portals. People can go as deep as they’d like on any cancer-related subject matter they choose.

Novel personalized programs help patients learn about cancer treatments and predictions about toxicity. The site also offers information and assistance on cancer survivorship. A small group—just seven full-time people—manages the site, with another 200 contributing information. “A big area of interest now is blending data-based content with medical records,” says Dr. Metz. “Because we’ve gathered information on every diagnosis, we can tailor educational information based on what we know holistically about a

diagnosis—even down to the mental health needs. It’s that integrated.”

OncoLink has received numerous awards and recognitions. The team is developing interactive content and personalized information for people, while collecting data to move the field forward. OncoLink has more than 285,000 unique visitors every month.

Where It All Began and Where He’s Headed

“I’ve been so fortunate in my career,” says Dr. Metz. He looks back at his Robert Wood Johnson Medical School experience and how well it prepared him for the significant academic and clinical career milestones he’s tallied up. “I had such good clinical training. I felt like I could step into any environment,” he adds.

That confidence—together with his preparation and education at the medical school—has resulted in a remarkable career. His influence, inquisitiveness, and knowledge have contributed to advancements in patient care and cancer treatment here and around the world. **M**

Esi M. Rhett-Bamberg, MD '07:**A Girl Born on Sunday***—Continued from page 43*

Department of Anesthesiology at UT for nine years, knew Dr. Rhett first as a resident and then as an outstanding clinical and academic colleague. “Students gravitate to her,” says Dr. Hagberg. “She is kind-hearted, generous, understandable, patient, and fun.”

As an attending anesthesiologist, “Esi is not just astute and skilled, she’s a great member of the team,” says Dr. Hagberg. “Patients trust her, deservedly, and, having volunteered to work as the sole anesthesiologist in the gastroenterology suite while the service was building up—with some of the sickest, most complex patients—she earned the lasting respect of nurses and physicians across multiple departments.”

Dr. Rhett is the immediate past president and an executive board member of the Mary Susan Moore Medical Society. Established in 1991 and renamed six years later for the first black woman to practice medicine in Texas, the organization supports African-American women physicians and provides health education and advocacy to communities of need in the Greater Houston and Galveston area.

A major part of the society’s work consists of mentoring premedical and medical students and raising money for scholarships. In 2014, it received permission from Crystal Emery to show a 10-minute clip from her documentary *Black Women in Medicine* at its Scholarship Awards event. Afterward, Emery stayed in touch as she developed the film into *Against All Odds*, the book in which she would include Dr. Rhett’s story.

It seems right that the relay team member whose name means “a girl born on Sunday” is devoting her career