Q&A with Erin Atkinson Cook, MD

**What do you like most about being a geriatrician?**
In medical school I was unaware that geriatrics was a medicine subspecialty. During my residency in internal medicine, I was blessed to have a wonderful mentor that introduced me to the field. He helped me realize that I experienced the most joy and satisfaction as a physician when I had encounters with older adults. I am grateful to him that this is the path I have chosen, as I truly love my job!

**What do you like most about being a geriatrician?**
The patients! I believe my patients teach me just as much as I teach them. I enjoy that sometimes my best intervention for someone is in the spirit of “less is more” and realizing that this is an acceptable choice.

“**My average day is spent doing what I love: spending time with my family and my patients.**”

I love that quality of life is a primary focus of my practice.

**Tell us about your educational or research activities.**
My passion is education. I teach medical students, residents, and fellows about geriatric medicine and the tools needed to be a great physician for older adults in the future. My goal is to make geriatrics a more attractive field to young students and physicians. I’m currently participating in a medical education fellowship at UCLA to improve my teaching skills and advance educational projects in geriatrics. Since most older adults in America are not cared for by board-certified geriatricians it is important that primary care physicians are properly trained to care for this special population. I am very involved in the Geriatric Fellowship program at UCLA serving as core faculty member and site director for the program.

**What is your wish list?**
I wish to create more resident and medical student educational activities in geriatrics in order to foster interest in the field and help ensure that internal medicine and family medicine physicians are properly trained to care for older adults in their future practices. I wish there was more support for the UCLA Geriatric Fellowship, which is a vital educational training program for advancing quality care for older adults. I wish I had a dedicated funding source so I could pursue these educational projects and improve the fellowship program. Finally, I wish my clinic had valet parking for the patients!
What are your biggest challenges in geriatrics?
There often is not a “right” answer in geriatrics. This can be frustrating for both patients and doctors. The lack of medical research on older patients contributes to this uncertainty. Another challenge I face is “ageism” from other healthcare providers. I strongly believe that you cannot judge a patient by their age.

What is your average day like?
My average day is spent doing what I love: spending time with my family and my patients. I see patients at my clinic in Westwood 4 days a week. I’m a mom to a feisty and independent toddler girl (she inherited these traits from her mom) and energetic four year old. Needless to say, each day is busy and always full of surprises! Both my family and patients keep me on my toes.

What are your professional roles and activities?
I am a “clinician educator” which means I spend the majority of my time seeing patients at my clinic in Westwood. I focus on primary care for the older adult, but also provide consultative services on geriatric syndromes for other physicians. Additionally, I spend about 8 weeks a year seeing patients in the hospital who have been admitted to our geriatric inpatient unit in Santa Monica. As a teacher, I have the privilege of working with UCLA students, residents, and fellows in the clinic, hospital, and classroom.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?
I am married to my high school sweetheart! We have been married eight wonderful years. We have two wonderful children named Colin and Katherine who will be turning four and two respectively this December.

To learn more about the UCLA Geriatrics programs and how to get involved, please visit http://geronet.ucla.edu