

May 5, 2014



**Dr. Allan Eckhaus**  
Plastic Surgeon, Rouge Valley

Dear Friends,

When I started university I certainly hadn't thought of becoming a surgeon.

I liked math and science, but beyond that I had no idea of what I really wanted to do when I finished school. While I was taking my undergraduate degree, I happened to volunteer at a hospital to read to patients, visit or play cards with them. I really enjoyed the opportunity to help people in any way that I could, and that's when I decided I wanted to go to medical school.

During medical school, at one of my in-hospital rotations, I found out how plastic surgery was a way I could make a difference to all kinds of people, and not just through cosmetic surgery the way plastic surgery is typically portrayed in the media.

Now as a plastic surgeon at Rouge Valley, I'm able to fulfill my goals and help a variety of people. You and I have this in common. After all, as a donor to Rouge Valley, you make an incredible difference in the lives of our patients by helping give the doctors and nurses the right tools to use. Thank you!

Similar to how many people sometimes have misconceptions about plastic surgeons, people don't always understand how a donation can help their community hospital.

Trust me, your donation makes a big difference. Doctors and surgeons, like myself, rely on your generosity to have the best tools to help our patients. Every year we ask the Foundation to use your donations to buy what we need. It's our equipment "wish list".

That's why I hope you will share your wonderful generosity today by making a kind gift to the Rouge Valley Health System Foundation. Your donation will give me and all of my colleagues the best equipment to help look after you, your loved ones and your neighbours when you need it most.

I chose to join Rouge Valley's great surgical team because our hospital is a place I knew I could care for a wide variety of plastic surgery patients including those with hand trauma, skin cancer, breast cancer and burns.

One extremely rewarding part of my practice is working with breast cancer patients who have lost one or both breasts to the disease. Recently, I received a moving thank you letter from my patient, Judy. I met her after she had already been through a difficult emotional and physical time recovering from her many previous surgeries related to her breast cancer.

Judy had already had a mastectomy and radiation, but a side effect of her radiation treatments was that she had a wound that just would not heal. Having dealt with this for a very long time, she was obviously quite distraught, and feeling defeated even though she'd "won" her battle against cancer.

As someone with specialized training in breast reconstruction, Judy's situation was one I had seen many times before.

Before she came to see me, she had been through multiple procedures to try to close the wound, but it kept opening up. Understandably, Judy was very nervous about undergoing any more surgery. So, I showed her how I could remove all the old infection and finally close the wound with healthy new tissue. She said yes and we went ahead right away.

The wound that had been open for so long – and had caused Judy so much anxiety – healed within a week. Judy even allowed herself to dream again about reconstruction (which is restoring the appearance of a breast, and is an option for many women after a mastectomy). After discussing it with her husband and both of them realizing that there may finally be some hope, she decided to go ahead.

You'll be pleased to know we've just finished her reconstruction and she's very happy. It is rewarding to be able to have the skills and training to help this woman go from an open and draining wound that she had lived with for over a year, to a fully restored breast that allows her to feel like a healthy and whole person again. And these techniques and principles of plastic surgery very much apply to other forms of cancer, reconstruction, and difficult wounds.

Now not all of my patients are women with breast cancer.

In fact a big bulk of my practice is directly related to something so many of us don't think about as much as we probably should – skin cancer.

When I found out that I had the chance to write to you, I thought I would take the opportunity to sneak in a little medical advice.

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First, please ask your family doctor or dermatologist to check your moles. Second, with the summer months fast approaching please be diligent about basic sun protection. Limit your exposure to the sun by always using sunscreen and adopting good sun avoidance habits like wearing hats and sunglasses.

If you are able to follow these two little pieces of advice, you can really lower your skin cancer risk and protect your health.

Today, though, the main reason for writing you is to say thank you for your continued support. You're contributing to the health care of everyone in your community. Your gifts are used directly for the betterment of patients.

You should also know that your donations are used with the utmost of care, integrity and efficiency. Every dollar you give is really appreciated and used very well.

It takes a lot to run a hospital; it takes a lot of people. Donors like you are part and parcel of that team.

The doctors, nurses and all of the staff here at Rouge Valley recognize this every day. We can see how important donors are in the upgraded physical spaces that we have, in the constant improvements that are made and in the new equipment that we use. I know we couldn't perform at our best without donors like you.

Earlier I mentioned that we have a "wish-list" at Rouge Valley. This year, there's a really important item on that list. It's called a mini "C-Arm" and it's used to take a live x-ray as I do surgery. By just tapping a foot pedal, I can have one static image on the video monitor; but if I keep my foot down, the video monitor shows a real-time moving x-ray image as I work, helping guide me as I use surgical tools to repair bones, remove foreign bodies, and reduce fractures and dislocations.

Because it's portable and produces very low levels of radiation, I can use the mini c-arm in the operating room during delicate trauma or reconstructive surgeries for fingers, hands and feet. The images it provides will allow me to perform very precise surgeries with few complications, smaller incisions and quicker healing.

Plus, I'll also be able to operate the equipment myself without having to call in a special technician, or delay surgery while we wait for patients to go to the Diagnostic Imaging department for a traditional x-ray. That means I can help more people in less time! And since it emits such a low dose of radiation, it is very safe. In fact, the patient, the surgical nurses and I won't have to wear lead vests or any x-ray protection.

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The mini C-Arm has made it through the strict hospital review process to show the Foundation it's worthy of your support:

- it will help multiple surgical divisions (plastic and orthopaedic surgeons are at the top of that list)
- it will allow some procedures to be performed under a local anesthetic in the Ambulatory Care Unit
- because the surgeon can watch on a monitor – in real time – as they use medical equipment to fix the small bones, muscles and tendons in the hands and feet, they will be more confident in their work and the patient's outcome
- the surgeries won't need to be booked based on the schedule of a specialized diagnostic imaging technician because the surgeons can operate it by themselves
- it has the capability to help many patients every day from the ER to the OR!
- the incisions will be smaller, and the healing time shorter
- important surgeries won't be delayed while the surgeons are waiting for the patients to receive regular x-rays or for other operating room equipment to become available

Now I just need your help. Will you please share a thoughtful donation today? You'll give us the best chance of purchasing some of the approved equipment, like the mini C-Arm, that we need as early as possible.

Thank you again for joining with me to help make sure our patients have access to the most up-to-date equipment and procedures. Your kind support will mean your loved ones and your neighbours receive the care they deserve when they visit Rouge Valley's hospitals.

Sincerely,



Dr. Allan Eckhaus  
Plastic Surgeon, RVHS

P.S. Just like you, I used to have misconceptions about plastic surgery until I saw how I could help so many patients with a variety of medical problems and diseases, including cancer. Please send a donation today, to help all of us continue to do what we love to do which is help our patients receive the best medical care available.