



Dr. Blake Papsin (MD, MSc, FRCS, FACS, FAAP – President of SENTAC 2005)

Brief Biography:

I am a Professor in the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of Toronto and have been a full-time paediatric otolaryngologist at The Hospital for Sick Children since July 1996. I trained in otolaryngology at the University of Toronto and completed a paediatric otolaryngology fellowship at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children in London, England. I have an MSc in Psychoacoustics and perform additional research in this field. I am the inaugural chair of the Cochlear Americas Chair in Auditory Development at the University of Toronto.

My clinical focus is the surgical rehabilitation of hearing loss, and I direct the Cochlear Implant Program in addition to running the bone-anchored hearing aid and auricular prosthesis programs. Our laboratory studies the growth and development of the auditory system after cochlear implantation. I hold grants, publish extensively and speak widely on the subject of surgical rehabilitation of hearing loss. I feel fortunate to have had a few specific opportunities and one is that I began clinical practice at a time when the auditory neuroprosthetic became available clinically. Another is that I was a SENTAC president and sat on the executive of this society for a number of years. I live in Toronto with Lisa my wife, our 5 children and Chudleigh the wonder dog.

It is really not that hard to recollect the relationship between SENTAC and my career or me personally for that matter. When I finished training in 1996, Jacob Friedberg (President 1998) asked that I join him at the annual meeting and I did. I immediately noticed the atmosphere in the SENTAC meeting room was more like a group of friends than an otolaryngologic meeting. There were no speakers attacked and I actually remember a questioner suggesting ways the young speaker could improve their analysis and manuscript (more likely than not it was Bob Ruben who improved my science and thinking in this way countless times). I was hooked.

The word on the street, and I too have mistakenly encouraged this mode of thinking, was that SENTAC was a welcoming place for juniors to present and it was early in the academic year so projects in development could be brought “out” for feedback before the spring meetings. I learned that although both of these things are true, SENTAC additionally offered much more. The magic was the diversity and multi-disciplinary membership. Egos disappeared in this environment and teams emerged. An insightful question for my team’s work for example would more likely come from a speech and language

pathologist or an audiologist as I had already considered it as an otolaryngologist. My own academic career grew very quickly and with a deep root system partly because of the SENTAC soil my ideas were planted in. Development of teams has become the facet of my career I am most proud of and this is directly a result of SENTAC and the countless “teams” that attend together (as an example, for years San Diego and Toronto’s “teams” had a port tasting night of all things – ok...so maybe more than a taste).

When Bruce Maddern (President 2003) asked if I would consider a leadership role I quickly agreed although I’ll admit now I had no idea he was asking me to be president (I figured I’d just agreed to chair something). I don’t want to sound disingenuously modest when I say that I felt incredibly surprised and honoured to have been asked so early in my career. It has never been clear to me whether SENTAC’s confidence in me spilled over into my career or something in my career development made this the next natural step. In any case this year was jet fuel for my personal and professional development. The focus of my presidency was to encourage non-otolaryngologists to join SENTAC. I developed the pre-conference symposium (we did it first at the Toronto meeting and Sheila Seid was of incalculable value) to both highlight the programs of the host city but also with the hope that some local professionals would attend the meeting and stay! I cannot possibly put into words the pride I felt looking at the SENTAC “bell” in my office during my year of service. Handing it to Sally was bittersweet (sweet because it meant I was program chair and that has always been my favourite job because I got to hear about every new project first).

So why not drift away now that my term on the executive has long passed and my junior colleagues are taking their turns in service? This question reoccurs annually as Lisa and I consider how to accept all the exciting invitations we get as the laboratory and clinic turn out more and more exciting work. The answer is there will always be room for SENTAC because that is where our closest and dearest friends meet. I may wave to them at COSM or AAO but to catch up on family, deeply discuss success and help each other overcome obstacles requires the SENTAC environment. This applies equally to senior colleagues and new members. Those who choose SENTAC, choose academic excellence, philanthropy, service, multi-disciplinary learning, friendship....they are my kind of people, SENTAC people.

In a professional life full of highlights my membership and involvement with SENTAC is one of the most treasured.

Toronto, 2011