

TOP DOCTORS 2024: Pediatric Cardiology Q&As

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 30, 2023 BY VIRGINIA BUSINESS

Dr. Alexander Ellis



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Pediatric and Adult Congenital cardiologist, Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters; Associate professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, Eastern Virginia Medical School, *Norfolk*

Other medical specialties: I am also the co-director of advanced cardiac imaging at CHKD and the director of the adult congenital heart disease program.

Education: Bachelor's degree, Princeton University; master's in biology, McGill University; medical degree, Medical College of Virginia/Virginia Commonwealth University; internal medicine/pediatrics residency and pediatric cardiology fellowship, Medical University of South Carolina; adult congenital heart disease training, Children's Hospital Philadelphia

Family: My wife, Amy Skorupa, and I met in medical school at MCV (literally over a dead body). She is now an adult medical oncologist here in Hampton Roads, specializing in breast oncology. We have two children, Jacob, 20, and Sarah, 17. Jacob is a junior at the University of Richmond, concentrating in political science and leadership and running on the cross-country/track team. Sarah is a senior at Princess Anne High School in the international baccalaureate program and will also be attending the University of Richmond, where she was recruited to play field hockey.

Career mentors: Growing up, my next-door neighbor was Dr. Edwin Myer, chair of pediatric neurology at MCV, and he was a major influence for me to enter medicine, especially pediatrics. Within cardiology, I have had many wonderful mentors and attending physicians at MUSC, but especially Dr. Andy Atz, and Dr. Gary Webb from the Children's Hospital Philadelphia.

Fan of: I married into a Chicago Cubs household so I certainly cheer for them, but it is often a source of frustration and disappointment (except in 2016!). I am a big fan of music — of many genres — and love to attend concerts or shows. I also love to see my kids' athletic events — especially track meets and field hockey games.

You worked in Panama's rainforests. How did you go from that to working in medicine? After college, I knew I did not want to go straight to medical school. My thesis adviser at Princeton offered me the opportunity to do field work for him on Barro Colorado Island in Panama (part of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute). After a few months in the rainforest working on his projects, I was fortunate that he helped me develop my own research project involving climate change and tropical forests, which then became my graduate thesis at McGill.

However, after lugging heavy gas analyzers and other equipment miles into the rainforest every day, dealing with aggressive monkeys and mosquitoes, and especially having to write never-ending grant-funding proposals, I thought I could have a more immediate and concrete impact on peoples' lives as a physician. If nothing else, I would not get as many bug bites.

What new congenital heart disease treatments are you particularly excited about? I am especially interested in cardiac imaging, whether that be echocardiography or CT/MRI. One of the major advances that our field has had in the last 30 years has been the ability to noninvasively image the heart and great vessels with significantly more clarity/resolution than we have ever

had, allowing for better preoperative/transcatheter procedural planning, shorter intervention times and higher success rates.

I am also enthusiastic about new research collaboratives for patients with congenital heart disease. This is a vulnerable, complex population that has previously not benefited from many dedicated research initiatives. Now, there are pharmacologic and medical device trials specifically geared towards patients with congenital heart disease, especially the teenagers and adults living with it.