

## Spotlight on esteemed WDS Member, Dr. Amy Paller

By Kate Oberlin, MD



Dr. Amy Paller is the Walter J. Hamlin Professor and Chair, Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Skin Disease Research Center at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. She received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Brown University and her medical degree from Stanford University. Dr. Paller completed residency training in both Pediatrics and Dermatology at Northwestern University and her postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of North Carolina. She is an author of more than 400 peer-reviewed publications and serves on the Council for the National Institute for Arthritis, Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. Her NIH-funded laboratory focuses on the use of nanotechnology for topically applied gene regulation in treating skin disorders and on the role of glycolipids in the impaired wound healing and cutaneous innervation of diabetes. She runs a large clinical trials unit focused on pediatric dermatology. She has been President of several national and international dermatologic societies, including the WDS. Dr. Paller is an eminent leader in pediatric dermatology and has been bestowed with multiple honors, including the Rothman Award from the SID, the Clarence S. Livingood, MD Memorial Award from the AAD, the Mentor of the Year Award/ Rose Hirschler Award/ Wilma Bergfield, MD Visioning and Leadership Award from the WDS, and the Founder's Award from the Chicago Dermatological Society.

**What motivates you?** I'm driven by a passion to make a difference, whether in the lives of my patients, in the future careers of my incredibly enthusiastic trainees, or in adding to our understanding of how the skin works. I particularly like to work collaboratively – and learn so much from doing so. Dermatology is such an exciting field right now – with discoveries in the clinic and in the lab leading to such an array of novel approaches therapeutically. I love being part of this journey.

**Who has influenced you the most?** I am influenced daily by everyone with whom I work from my fellow dermatologists and researchers to our trainees and my administrative support. When just starting in dermatology, my mentors (such as Nan Esterly, Ruth Freinkel, Al Briggaman, and Fred Malkinson) really helped to steer me in directions that could leverage my interest and my passion – and I am eternally grateful. Mentorship never stops – and I continue to learn more from my colleagues than I could possibly offer to them.

**Which leadership skills were the most difficult for you to develop?** I have been fortunate to have been in leadership roles since shortly after I finished fellowship, first as a chief of dermatology at our Children's hospital/Dept of pediatrics and for almost 15 years now as a department chair of dermatology. Along the way, it's been a pleasure to serve as a

leader for many of our national and international organizations. My desire to get things done in an efficient way has been a great help in moving organizations and programs forward. However, an early lesson learned (and still a challenge at times) is the need to delegate and wait patiently for others to come through, even if that requires some prodding and tips along the way. This approach, though, engages a group in “owning” projects, pulls in a lot of creative ideas, and tends to lead to the best possible endpoint with broad acceptance – even if it takes longer.

**What advice do you have for young dermatologists about reaching their career goals?** 1) Figure out what you are passionate about and focus on making this a large part of your career so you’ll truly enjoy your work; 2) Build a team of mentors – and take the time to engage them in decision-making and skill-building; 3) Be entrepreneurial and take advantage of the best of your environment to grow personally and professionally; and 4) Make sure to save time for family and friends.

**How do you manage an appropriate work-life balance?** I have a wonderful husband who from the beginning has been supportive and shared with me throughout the past almost 35 years the joys of raising my 3 sons, but also insisted that we save time on weekends to be together alone. I have always been a “juggler”, and am able to stop and start projects easily – which helped me to spend time with family and others – and then easily get back where I left off. I think it is also important to “say no”, not just to unnecessary projects, but to life tasks that just are not important. For example, having someone help with cleaning – and even with grocery shopping and chopping vegetables for salads and meals – let me have more time with my children and my husband throughout the years. Looking for ways to increase “quality time” while saving overall time has been key.

**Do you have a favorite book?** I love to read (although it’s hard to find time). I was recently catching up on my “want to read” list and enjoyed *The Nightingale* (although it’s been out for a few years).

**What do you like to do for fun?** We’re lovers of theatre – and see wonderful plays in the Chicago area once or twice a month. We love walks around our area and seeing our sons, including more recently travelling to Dallas to see our now 8 month old first granddaughter!