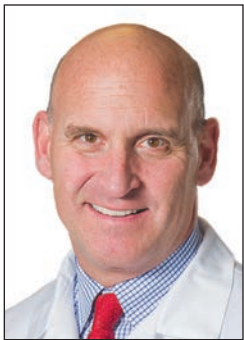


## A Center of Excellence

An Interview with Todd J. Albert, M.D.,  
Surgeon-in-Chief and Medical Director, Hospital for Special Surgery



Todd J. Albert, M.D.

**EDITORS' NOTE** Dr. Todd Albert is also Korein-Wilson Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery. He is the Chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and a Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at Weill Cornell Medical College. The author of seven books and more than 40 book chapters, he has also published 300 peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles. Previously, he was Chairman of the Department of Orthopaedics and President of The Rothman Institute at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia. Albert graduated from University of Virginia School of Medicine, and performed a fellowship in spinal surgery at the Minnesota Spine Center.

### How do you define your role at HSS?

The Surgeon-in-Chief role means I'm in charge of all the practitioners here as they fulfill our three most important missions, which are excellent clinical care, academics involving research and education, and unifying the troops. About 80 percent of our production is surgery. Since we have the benefit of being a focused hospital, everything is related in some way to the provision of that care. My goal is to make sure that the patient gets the greatest and most efficient care, and that we maintain the highest standards.

The Chief Medical Officer role is more concerned with making sure we're matching all of our requirements for the state and the country as a healthcare provider. It also includes making sure if anything like Ebola happens, we take responsibility for how we should handle it. I'm in charge of the medical board, which is the executive committee of the hospital.

I'm also a spine surgeon with a focus on cervical spine problems.

It's an advantage as a leader to be a practicing physician. One of the most important principles is walking the walk.

### As a leader in the spinal area, would you touch on recent advances?

Over the past 10 years, there has been a move towards less invasive surgery. What's particularly optimistic on the scientific front is treating spinal cord injury with drugs coming off patent. There are amazing things going on within rehabilitation. Another focus has been utilizing cell and tissue engineering to regenerate tissues.

We've also done quite well with outcomes of surgery, in terms of what works and what doesn't, and what is cost effective.

### Are you concerned whether the challenges in healthcare can be met?

I'm not sure as a country that we're on the right track. Using HSS as an example, centers of excellence and focused factories are the most efficient way to care for disease. There is a reason that our total cost of care for any pathway is less. It's because we have fewer re-admissions and fewer re-operations, and that is really efficient.

The problem can be tackled, but maybe the right thing is to set up centers to lower the cost of care overall.

### What excited you about joining HSS?

To be in charge of a place that is so focused on the disease I take care of as a practitioner and to find ways to do it better excited me immensely. To be able to interface nationally and internationally with patients and other providers made it that much better. This pulpit is an opportunity that people in our field only get once in a lifetime. ●

## A Multidisciplinary Approach

An Interview with Mary K. Crow, M.D.,  
Physician-in-Chief and Chair of the  
Department of Medicine, Hospital for Special Surgery



Mary K. Crow, M.D.

**EDITORS' NOTE** Dr. Mary Crow is also Professor of Medicine and Chief of the Rheumatology Division at Weill Cornell Medical College and Professor of Immunology in its Graduate School of Medical Sciences. She holds the Joseph P. Routh Endowed Chair in Medicine and is a Senior Scientist and Co-Director of the Mary Kirkland Center for Lupus Research and Director of the Autoimmunity and Inflammation Program in the Research Division of HSS. Crow received her M.D. at Cornell, completed her Internal Medicine and Rheumatology subspecialty training at New York Hospital and HSS, and completed her post-doctoral research training at Rockefeller University in the laboratory of Dr. Henry Kunkel.

### How do you define your role and your key areas of focus?

I oversee most of the physicians, including pediatricians, pediatric rheumatologists, endocrinologists, and infectious disease doctors, and we've had a very strong rheumatology department for years, which I oversee. Perioperative medicine has additionally become a larger focus for us – these are the internists who take care of the surgical patients.

I'm in charge of the clinicians who don't perform surgeries but who often interact with the surgeons. I oversee their activities in the context of their clinical care, education, and research.

Regarding clinical care, we have about 25 rheumatology practices, which function like private practices but with physicians who are employed by the hospital in contract positions. I'm responsible for ensuring that they run their practices efficiently.

I work closely with my senior administrative director to define and review the operational processes of each practice. We make sure that the staff functions well and that we have good practices across all clinical areas. We have to pay attention to our budgets, as well as to recruiting in order to maintain our strength in all areas.

### Have there been strong advances within rheumatology?

The big advances have been in the inflammatory arthritis area, through the development of biologic therapies that have changed the lives of rheumatoid arthritis patients.

Many new discoveries have been made concerning molecular pathways and the biology of how diseases develop, and what makes people sick. While this knowledge hasn't been translated into new therapies in every area, one of the strengths of HSS is identifying therapeutic targets. If we are able to target a particular molecular pathway, we have a strong chance of developing a good therapy.

There have also been advances in the care of some of the other diseases that haven't been based on the development of new therapies but instead on learning how to manage the patient medically in a comprehensive way.

### What is it about the institution that has made it so successful?

It helps that we focus on a relatively defined area of medicine and that we have high standards.

Our goal is to influence medicine and surgery around the world in all our areas, so there is always positive pressure to expand beyond our own doors and share our breakthroughs globally.

There's also a very multidisciplinary and collegial approach to achieving the high quality of care that we deliver. All components of the institution – including physicians, nurses, other healthcare providers, and administration – are engaged in making important decisions and developing strategies, and this leads to more collegiality.

Our CEO is good at helping the institution be successful financially and that allows our academic research side to be successful. ●