



Physician Spotlight:

Emma Guttman-Yassky MD, PhD



Emma Guttman-Yassky MD, PhD, Vice Chair for Research in the Department of Dermatology and Director of the Center for Excellence in Eczema at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, spends most of her days toiling away in the Laboratory of Inflammatory Skin Diseases. The translational research that she conducts as a physician-scientist is changing the way we think about and treat atopic dermatitis in children and adults.

Is it difficult to balance all of your responsibilities?

Emma Guttman-Yassky MD, PhD: It's not easy when you do clinical work, research, and juggle family responsibilities.

I surround myself with excellent help at home and in the lab. My parents are in Israel, and my mom helped a lot when my children were small, but we moved to the US when they were still very small and needed paid help. You need to surround yourself with competent people because you can't do it all yourself. And it is extremely important to have a supportive spouse, and family, and I could not have done it without them.

Tell us about your work schedule.

Dr. Guttman-Yassky: I spend a day and a half in the clinic each week, and the rest of my time is spent doing research in my lab. My translational research is based on patients and patient samples, so if I don't see the patients, it may be harder to recruit for my studies. I also like the bench to bedside and back approach, as ultimately we do research to benefit patients. Some of my best research ideas come from seeing patients in the clinic. As a physician-scientist, it's important to see patients who have the disease that you specialize in, and they drive what I do.

How did you become a physician-scientist?

Dr. Guttman-Yassky: It was solely by chance. I always wanted to be a dermatologist because I had eczema and am very passionate about eczema. I did a dermatology residency in Israel and in the US. In Israel, I had to wait for more than a year for a residency spot because there were very few available. I spent this time doing research on Kaposi's sarcoma in the lab of Ronit Sarid, PhD (Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel). Without her, I would never have become a researcher. She is responsible for

getting me to love research and made me realize I am good at it. I published 16 papers during my PhD.

Was Dr. Sarid a good mentor?

Dr. Guttman-Yassky: She was an amazing woman. She showed me that it is possible to juggle it all. You have to be passionate and love what you do, and you need to have a partner who is supportive. You don't want someone who will set you back and put their career and needs before your own. She had three children, a career, and was an active mom and spouse. She made me see I can succeed and have time for my family.

How do you approach mentoring other women?

Dr. Guttman-Yassky: More than half of my lab is female, and I am very supportive. I always put myself where I was years ago and try to do what I wanted my mentors to do for me. It is important to be a good mentor and teach the next generation. It is essential to find good mentors who will be supportive. There are some who mainly care about themselves, and there are the mentors who think, "How can I promote these people?" I am in the latter camp.

Was it difficult for you to be taken seriously as a female physician-scientist?

Dr. Guttman-Yassky: It took time and determination, and was not so easy in the beginning. I had to work even harder as I had to prove that I was competent and not successful just because I was married to Jim (James G. Krueger, MD, PhD, Director of the Milstein Medical Research Program at the Rockefeller University in New York City).

Any tips for those just starting down this path?

Dr. Guttman-Yassky: You need to maintain a balance and to learn to say no. There are many opportunities, and it's important to only take the ones that are really important and say no to the others. You need to be very persistent and focused, particularly in the beginning. Take one disease and focus on it. You can't work on multiple things when you are starting on this path. Be patient. It will take some time. Success will not be immediate, but it will be worth it. I find it very gratifying to be part of therapeutic development and to improve patients' lives. ■