

Editorial

"In My Experience...Delivering More Than Surgery: Building a Patient Experience That Matters"

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The author discusses his experience in developing a destination joint orthopaedic practice.

If you were my residents, my first question would be: What do you really want? What do you want from your career—and what legacy do you want to leave in orthopedics?

For me, the answer has always been clear. We can all operate. Some do it well, some not so well. But what really matters to me is how we deliver care.

Yes, I trained under great surgeons like Dr. Lombardi and Keith Berend. But many of my biggest inspirations are outside of medicine—Phil Knight, Steve Jobs, and especially Walt Disney. That magical feeling when you walk into Disney World? That's the feeling I want patients to have when they walk into my practice: comfort, confidence, and connection—even when they're scared or anxious.

From day one, I've prioritized education over everything. I wanted people to see me as human first, surgeon second. I told patients, "I'll treat you like my own mom or dad"—and I love my parents.

When I started in Detroit, I hustled hard. Six seminars a month in churches, Paneras, senior centers—anywhere I

could set up implants, coffee, and bagels. I grew from 75 joints my first year to 300 by year four.

When I moved to Meadville, time got tighter. So I streamlined. Monthly public seminars in my office—now with 75–100 attendees each. I created a two-hour Keynote presentation covering arthritis, anatomy, treatment options, surgery, recovery—everything. I use humor, videos, real case studies. And every time I do one, it reignites my purpose.

My background is education. My dad taught in Meadville for 30+ years. My sisters, my wife—they're teachers. I see myself the same way: an educator who happens to replace hips and knees.

So, I built an entire team and culture around that experience. Meadville isn't a major hub. But I wanted it to feel like a destination. Like we rolled out the red carpet. Inspired by the book *Unreasonable Hospitality*, I focused on every detail: a human answers the phone. Patients are greeted with a smile. No automated prompts. No impersonal waiting rooms.

^a Dr. Molli is the founder and CEO of Whole Health Orthopedic Institute, which opened in January 2018. He is a native of Northwestern Pennsylvania and did his undergraduate and medical school in Erie, PA at Mercyhurst College and Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) respectively. He then completed a 5-year orthopedic surgery residency in the Metro-Detroit area through the St. John-Providence Health System. Upon completion of his residency, he completed an intense one-year Adult Reconstruction/Total Joint Fellowship in Columbus, OH. Dr. Molli practiced in a private practice setting in the Metro-Detroit area as an Adult Reconstruction specialist for nearly 5 years before relocating back to his hometown of Meadville, PA in 2015. Dr. Molli had a vision of creating an Adult Reconstruction/Total Joint Center of Excellence, which is focused on quality sub-specialty orthopedic care and the total "patient experience". When he created Whole Health Orthopedic Institute, it was created as a practice dedicated to pre-operative risk stratification, medical optimization, unparalleled pre-operative preparation/education, and exceptional surgical/post-surgical care. In addition to all of these medical components are ongoing data-driven research projects along with innovative practice development projects.

In addition to Dr. Molli's clinical practice, he is an avid orthopedic consultant and surgical proctor that travels both nationally and internationally to teach direct anterior total hip procedures, patient-specific total knee procedures and unicompartment knee replacement procedures. He has traveled and lectured all over the United States as well as in multiple European countries, Canada and Australia. He is one of only 4 designing surgeons on the Medacta MOTO Partial Knee Replacement project, which was globally released in March 2018 at the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA. Dr. Molli has been published in multiple medical journals over the years and currently participates in multiple ongoing research projects. He established the Whole Health Research Institute along with Molli Medical Consulting Company (M2C2),

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Eventually, I designed my dream office—warm, welcoming, more ski lodge than clinic. We even built a Mediterranean café in the lobby: Lucantino's Trattoria, named after my three boys. My mom's Zuppa Toscana is the best seller. And our barista Jennifer—she's basically our chief hospital-ity officer.

Every exam room has a large TV with Apple TV, streaming custom-made educational content. I've filmed over 100 videos, walking patients through every step of their journey. And we follow up—texts, emails, personalized check-ins. No one gets lost in the shuffle.

I also built an in-house theater and educational suite. Group education. Fireplace. Heritage oak mantle. All designed for comfort and clarity. Our nurse navigator Zach walks patients through the post-op experience on video before I even step into the room.

The physical space is handcrafted from Pennsylvania stone. Local builders. Local craftsmen. Even our contractor is the husband of one of my PAs. Every detail of the building is personal—because the care we deliver is personal.

We offer 24/7 access via emergency phones. We coordinate hotels for patients who travel from hours away. One hotel even started giving out flowers to our patients—without us asking. That's the power of shared culture.

We operate at a physician-owned surgical hospital, more boutique than hospital. Ten private rooms. Catered meals. Family-friendly accommodations. We even feed the hospital staff five days a week. Because if you want great care, you need to take care of your people.

When COVID hit, morale plummeted—like everywhere else. I was tired of micromanaging, so I brought in my life coach, Allison, as a practice consultant. She meets with our leadership team weekly. She keeps the practice healthy—our people aligned.

Letting go of control wasn't easy. For years, I was involved in every interview. Now? I trust my leaders. They know the vision. If someone doesn't fit the culture, they don't stay long. That's just the standard.

Patients feel the difference. They're not rushed. They're cared for. They tell their friends, "You'd be crazy to go anywhere else." And that means everything to me.

Most of my primary joint replacements are outpatient. Patients rarely stay overnight. And if they do, it's because it's the right call for them.

We've also built something I'm especially proud of: our in-house Wellness Institute. Nobody else I know has one. From day one, we medically optimize patients. We look at nutrition, mental health, smoking, home setup—everything. We don't just say, "Lose weight." We give them a plan. We support them through it.

We don't operate on smokers. We check nicotine levels. We use MEND for nutrition. Iovera for pain control—100% of my knees. My concierge patients even get pre-op coaching from Allison, my life coach, to manage anxiety.

We're now trialing neuromodulation units for sound therapy before surgery. Why? Because everything counts. Every touchpoint matters.

Even the name "Whole Health" came from a vision I shared with my best friend, Jared. Back in 2013, we dreamed of creating wellness communities—whole ecosystems for healthier living. Though we scaled it down, that same heart lives in my practice today.

If you're a young surgeon looking to build something like this, I have three pieces of advice:

1. Decide who owns your future. Do you want a safe salary or real independence? There's no wrong answer—but be honest with yourself.
2. Bet on yourself. Take calculated risks. Learn. Pivot. Don't overanalyze every decision—move fast and adjust. I don't gamble in Vegas. I gamble on myself.
3. Surround yourself with the right people. Keep your core tight. Treat them well. My wife, my business manager Sean, Allison, and my top clinical leads—I can't do this without them. They live the mission.

This isn't just a job for me. It's a calling. And I plan to keep evolving—surgically, medically, and personally—every single year.

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