

Meet Executive Council Member, Dr. Najjia Mahmoud



Najjia N. Mahmoud, MD
Emilie and Roland T.
DeHellebranth
Professor of Surgery
and Chief, Division of
Colon and Rectal
Surgery at the
University of
Pennsylvania

Fun facts:

My husband, Mark Sellers, is a skilled pilot and attorney. We live in an arboretum and have turned the yard into a garden and meadow. I play the flute and am on the board of a small baroque orchestra. We love to fly and own a Bellanca Super Viking. We fly it to Cape Cod regularly. No kids, but always two cats...

I was born and raised in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in a very rural part of the state. I learned gardening and farming from an early age, and my family either raised or foraged almost every vegetable we ate. That sparked my interest in horticulture, science, and the natural world.

I was also fortunate to grow up doing field research with my scientist father and helping him in his basic science lab. At the age of 16, he let me cut and stain slides for electron microscopy, use a scanning/tunneling Hitachi F-11 electron microscope, and develop the images I captured. By the time I was 18, I had published over 200 micrographs. My extensive experience in various science labs throughout my childhood and college years really solidified my interest in the science behind our surgical mission.

I left Wisconsin in 1989 for medical school and residency in New York City, attending Weill Cornell. I spent two years conducting basic science research with Dr. Monica Bertagnolli, during which we published and presented on the suppressive effects of COX-2 inhibitors on colorectal cancer in genetically engineered mice and studied the implications of that function. That research led to clinical trials in humans and sparked my interest in colorectal surgery and the treatment of colorectal cancer. It was during that time that I received my first grant from the ASCRS Research Foundation—a Limited Project Award—for which I'll forever be grateful. I became a member of ASCRS and really started to get to know and understand the organization during that period. My experiences and interactions, along with encouragement from Drs. Doug Wong, Monica Bertagnolli, and Jerome DeCosse, solidified my decision to train in colorectal surgery. I completed my colorectal residency at the University of Minnesota from 2000 to 2001, where I made lifelong friends and learned colorectal surgery from the best in the field.

In 2001, I was hired by Dr. Robert Fry at Thomas Jefferson University, and within a year, we found ourselves starting a brand-new Division of Colon and Rectal Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania. I am currently the Division Chief of Colon and Rectal Surgery and co-chair of the Professionalism Committee in our Department of Surgery.

Over the years, we have grown in number, expanded our scope of practice, started a fellowship, and contributed—both individually and as a group—to ASCRS, ABCRS, ACS, ASCO, and many other clinical and scientific organizations. I'm so proud of my division. My partners, both past and present, are the best colleagues I could hope for. The fellows we have trained remain our “crown jewels” and make us proud every day. It has truly been a joy.

My involvement with ASCRS has always been a source of pride, collegiality, community, and education. I have served on the Research Foundation (RF) Board of Trustees, the RF Grant Review Committee, the Editorial Board of *Diseases of the Colon & Rectum* (DCR), the Quality and Safety Committee, and various task forces focused on solving specific challenges within our field of surgery. I am currently the Dean of ASCRS U and take great pride in how comprehensive and impactful the platform has become.

I have also served as a member of the American Board of Colon and Rectal Surgery, chaired the Continuing Education Committee, and am a past President of the Board. Currently, I serve as President-Elect of ASCRS. My mission for the year is “Evidence-Based Excellence,” which reflects my desire for us to fully embrace the science behind patient care. Our Society—through the Research Foundation, collaborations with the ACS, ASCRS U, DCR, clinical practice guidelines (CPGs), and many other initiatives—is firmly grounded in the thoughtful application of science and evidence.

The Executive Council is currently focused on several key areas: ensuring sound governance of the Research Foundation; understanding the implications of the 125th Anniversary Campaign and keeping that vital initiative on track; negotiating the future of DCR with our publishing partner; and supporting the efforts of our individual committees. This year, we are also re-examining and reassessing our strategic plan to ensure we continue to serve the Society effectively and re-prioritize efforts that make the most sense as the funding and educational landscape continues to evolve.

