

Zoom On: Dr Rafael J. Grossmann



Rafael Grossmann, MD, FACS

Editorial Board member - IT

*****@***gmail.com

Healthcare Futurist, Technology
Innovator, Surgeon & Educator
USA

Dr Rafael Grossmann, MD, FACS, is a practicing surgeon in the USA as well as a global speaker, healthcare and education technologist and futurist. Originally from Venezuela, he did his surgery residency in Ann Arbor, MI, USA, and developed as a General, Trauma, Advanced Laparoscopic and Robotic surgeon; he now practices in Maine, USA. His passion is about the intersection of innovation technology and healthcare, and he views technology as a complement to the most important qualities of a medical provider: compassion and empathy.

What are your key areas of interest and research?

Clinically I'm a full-time trauma surgeon. On the side, I try to be an evangelist of digital health, especially of using technology in a smart way to connect and communicate better, augment and enhance how we do healthcare.

What are the major challenges in your field?

It always relates to how you use technology in the right way. The main problem I see with technology is that it's not equally available to many people. That is not a disadvantage, it's just a problem with it. It would be great if technology for good use would be available to more people globally so that they could enjoy its blessings. When people rely on technology too much, that's a problem because technology should be a way to make us more humane and more empathetic with whoever we're connecting with, be it a patient, or another provider, or colleague. I often think that the main and rather common disadvantage of technology is that it separates the humans instead of bringing them closer. With all that texting or emojis or something like that, you're just cutting the communication instead of amplifying it.

What is your top management tip?

Lead by example, be empathetic and listen.

What would you single out as a career highlight?

It's hard to say when you do the type of work I do. There are so many examples of what I did that I'm proud of. Speaking humbly, when you help someone, or save someone's life or someone's kid or someone's mother, you look back and are content that you were able to do those things.

In general, as a physician or as a surgeon, I feel very proud that I was able, for example, to do that [first surgery](#) with Google Glass. That started a whole career for me and not a career in a negative sense, as something you do to make money. To me it's been a very fulfilling activity, a passion to preach the value of technology to improve how we connect and communicate. That's probably a moment that I'm very proud of, to have been able to do it despite everything concocting against. And I wanted to do it, I knew the importance of doing it first and I did it, before everyone else in the world. I pushed myself and the team pushed themselves to do it, and that was a good move.

If you had not chosen this career path you would have become a...?

They ask me this question a lot. I really love what I do. I really love doing surgery and being a surgeon, and making a difference in the trauma field, or in the operating room, or in the ICU. I like to be able to help people, to be a resource for people on their most basic need which is healthcare. Last week a friend of mine called. He wasn't feeling good and I had to take him to the hospital on my day off. This is to have the privilege of someone trusting you to help them. To me, that's invaluable.

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So, to answer the question, I would do exactly the same. Being a physician and then being a surgeon, I would not have done anything differently. The big moves were alright, and having the family that I have, and professionally being able to do both things simultaneously, that is to have a full-time clinical career and a very busy digital health promotion, exploring and disrupting career, is also very fulfilling for me.

What are your personal interests outside of work?

I love reading, on both medicine and non-medicine topics. To me that's relaxing and allows me to fantasise. I'd also say the outdoors is my passion. There's no better therapy, no better time to create or be, to heal yourself or prevent yourself from getting sick than being outdoors. I live in a semi-rural area, but close to the city. That's a place where in five minutes I can be at a lake where no one is around and all you see is evergreens and boulders and mountains and ocean. That is priceless. Outdoors you connect with nature and that's probably what I find the most healing. You recognise other powers, whether you call them God or not, you feel that we have so much out there to be thankful for. It's easy to be reminded of that when you're out in the great outdoors, as they say.

Your favourite quote?

I always say that it is not about the technology, it's about the smart use of technology to help us create a more humane and empathetic healthcare system. That summarises my passion for technology, healthcare and also education. I really truly believe that when people talk about 'technology' as something evil, it's completely wrong. Technology is, in fact, the complete opposite if you use it in a smart way. It allows us to preserve empathy and compassion in medicine, and that's very important. We all are always trying to do the best we can in order to change healthcare to the good.

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