
Zoom On: Thomas Ryan, The Heart Institute Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center



[Asst. Prof. Thomas Ryan](#)

*****@***cchmc.org

Assistant Professor of Pediatrics -
University of Cincinnati
Asst. Professor - The Heart
Institute, Cincinnati Children's
Hospital Medical Center

Thomas Ryan, born and raised in Wichita, KS has a BS in biological sciences and his MD/PhD from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He completed his paediatrics residency training, his paediatric cardiology fellowship training and advanced fellowship in Paediatric Heart Failure/Transplant at [Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center](#). His clinical and research interests focus on heart failure, cardiomyopathy, cardiac transplantation, and mechanical circulatory support.

Dr. Ryan spoke to *Healthmanagement.org* about his key areas of interest, his career and the major challenges in his field.

1. What are your key areas of interest and research?

I am trained as a paediatric cardiologist, with advanced training in heart failure, heart transplant, and mechanical circulatory support. I am active with clinical and research in all three areas, but I am specifically interested in the development of heart failure in at-risk populations. This includes patients with anthracycline exposure, stem cell transplant recipients, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, epidermolysis bullosa, abnormal myocardium, and family history of cardiomyopathy. Prior research projects have focused on using non-invasive imaging to assess sub-clinical myocardial dysfunction.

2. What are the major challenges in your field?

As is often the case in paediatric diseases, and particularly in sub-specialty fields, populations are small relative to those in adult diseases. For example, a robust paediatric heart transplant program in the US may perform 15-25 transplants per year, which is certainly not enough to carry out broadly applicable research. As such, registries play a key role in many of our projects. I am fortunate to be at a major referral center for a number of conditions, but collaborative work is still key. There is also the need to convince our non-cardiology colleagues of the benefit in offering surveillance to the at-risk populations they follow.

3. What is your top management tip?

I tell trainees that, when approaching patients, they have to act with the confidence that they are right person for the job, but readily admit if they come up against something they don't know. Lack of information or knowledge, but with a willingness to figure it out, is far better than being caught in a lie. More importantly, patients (and especially parents of patients) are made quite uneasy by nervousness or lack of confidence.

4. What would you single out as a career highlight?

The road to earning my combined MD/PhD was long and arduous, making achieving that goal one of my career highlights (with many thanks due to my family, friends, and educators). From there I went on to post-graduate training at one of the premier paediatric hospitals in the world, Cincinnati Children's Hospital. On a personal note, one patient highlight that stands out is helping detect cancer in a young girl during my fellowship. As the last patient of the day I was seeing her in follow up for congenital heart disease, and on abdominal exam I felt a left-side mass concerning for Wilms tumour. We walked her down to Radiology, admitted her to Oncology, and within 2 days she had surgery to remove the tumour. The gratitude of her family was exactly the reason we all do this job.

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

As a kid I loved comedy, Steve Martin and Saturday Night Live were two early favourites. Other than being a class clown, it didn't go very far. In elementary school my parents were told I could be a good lawyer because I would frequently argue a point with the teachers. But my interest in science and medicine came pretty early, and by high school I think the dye was cast.

6. What are your personal interests outside of work?

I have twins that keep me quite busy. Other than spending time with them and my lovely wife, I occupy what time I can by going to the gym, playing basketball, listening to music, or watching a little something on TV. I wish I could confess to more refined hobbies.

7. Your favourite quote?

I have several, but I'll pick two that I think fit in well here. First is the motto from my home state of Kansas, "*Ad Astra per Aspera*," roughly translated as "to the stars through difficulties." Second is from the great internist Tinsley Harrison who was a big influence on the community of my medical school, "No greater opportunity or obligation can fall the lot of a human being than to be a physician. In the care of suffering he needs technical skill, scientific knowledge and human understanding. He who uses these with courage, humility and wisdom will provide a unique service to his fellow man and will build an enduring edifice of character within himself. The physician should ask of his destiny no more than this and he should be content with no less."

Image Credit: Cincinnati Children's Hospital

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