

Robert Cerfolio, M.D.

Associate Professor, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery

If you want to keep up with Dr. Robert Cerfolio, better put on your track shoes—or maybe baseball cleats, or a pair of ice skates.

Voted one of America's "Best Doctors" by his peers, and recognized as one of the world's busiest surgeons, Dr. Cerfolio performs over 800 procedures a year. Yet somehow he still manages to find time to teach base-running clinics for the neighborhood kids.

He learned the value of teamwork early, first as a baseball All American in school, and then as a semi-pro hockey player. Today Dr. Cerfolio credits the same strategy for the great results he's achieving doing a high volume of surgeries removing esophageal cancers and shaping a new esophagus from stomach tissue.

"Teamwork is the secret," said Dr. Cerfolio. "We developed an outstanding team of doctors, nurses and anesthesiologists here at UAB, and we get a lot of practice working together to help our patients."

As a collaborator in research to develop gene therapies for esophageal cancer, Dr. Cerfolio gathers tissue samples of adenocarcinomas for study.

"You might not expect to hear this from a surgeon, but in this type of cancer, surgery just isn't enough. We need a way to kill malignant cells more

selectively,” Dr. Cerfolio said. “As it stands now, if we catch it early before the malignancy has spread, surgery might give some younger, stronger patients a 50% to 70% chance of survival. But this disease is often silent until it’s too advanced. The overall 5-year survival rate is only 5% to 10%. Having a gene therapy that could go after the cancerous cells could make such a dramatic difference in the prognosis we could offer our patients.”

After long winters studying at the University of Rochester, Cornell and the Mayo clinic, Dr. Cerfolio and his wife were ready for warmer weather. At UAB he found a professional climate that was equally appealing.

“So much exciting, cutting-edge work is being done here. Working with people like Dr. Curiel, Dr. Yamamoto and Dr. Canakis is terrific. Everyone is so cooperative and focused.”

In his free time—between surgery, teaching, research, reviewing and editing journal articles, and serving as Chief and Director of Thoracic Surgery for Birmingham Veterans Administration Hospital and on the Medical Leadership Committee—Dr. Cerfolio enjoys sharing his passion for baseball and hockey with his three sons.

He works hard, he plays hard, and he never forgets the value of teamwork in achieving a common goal.