

Dr. Caroline Chebli

Orthopedic Surgeon

Dr. Chebli is a Board-certified and Fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon with a specialty in shoulder and elbow replacement, reconstruction, fractures, and ligament repair. She's a part of Kennedy-White Orthopaedic Center, the largest practice of its kind in Sarasota. Caroline is the only female and only shoulder and elbow surgeon in the 14-physician practice, having joined the Center in 2013. "I want to be relevant and make a difference for my patients. When a patient has restored function and is pain-free, I feel that I have made a difference in his or her life."





If you think of an orthopedic surgeon as a middle-aged male, think again because Dr. Caroline Chebli is far from the stereotype you may have

envisioned. Dr. Chebli (pronounced like the wine) is a Board-certified and Fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon with a specialty in shoulder and elbow replacement, reconstruction, fractures, and ligament repair. She's a part of Kennedy-White Orthopaedic Center, the largest practice of its kind in Sarasota. Caroline is the only female and only shoulder and elbow surgeon in the 14-physician practice, having joined the Center in 2013.

"As a medical student, you rotate specialties. I enjoyed the time in orthopedics. I did six years residency with one year at the National Institutes of Health in bone metabolism. I had two wonderful mentors along the way. One was at the University of Washington where I received the sole available Fellowship. Another mentor was at the University of Maryland. His good advice has stayed with me. He said to know who is the right person to operate on, to step away when it's the best thing to do, and to admit that you sometimes don't have the answer," Caroline says.

According to Dr. Chebli, orthopedic materials and processes have not changed drastically over the years—the stem is titanium, the ball is cobalt chrome, and the socket is plastic. What is somewhat new is reverse shoulder surgery for which she trained during her Fellowship. Used for arthritis and rotator cuff tears, she did the fourth such surgery in Florida and her second one last August. Usually for a younger person who has good bone structure, the surgery is a bone-preserving procedure that requires less bone removal. Over the years she has performed thousands of shoulder and elbow surgeries equating to 300-500 per year. She spends three days a week at the office seeing about 40 patients a day and two days a week in surgery at Sarasota Memorial Hospital and Doctors Hospital of Sarasota.

Caroline says, "I have control issues. I am a perfectionist. I am tenacious and stubborn, but I know when to quit and say enough is enough. I want to be relevant and make a difference for my patients. When a patient has restored function and is pain-free, I feel that I have made a difference in his or her life. They are more appreciative of their life after surgery. My inspiration comes from wanting to do more, be better, and help my patients achieve their goals."

When non-operative treatments such as injections, physical therapy, activity modification, and anti-inflammatory drugs fail to help a patient, Caroline discusses surgery which can often be performed with smaller incisions. Arthroscopic surgery shortens the time the patient is "open" and incisions in non-arthroscopic surgery are large enough for the surgeon to do what has to be done.

Even though women have entered male-dominated careers in increasing numbers, females make up only four percent of all orthopedic surgeons. She admits there is a glass ceiling and it has turned out to be harder than she expected. She says her interview for medical school was challenging and wrought with illegal questions. When she and other female orthopedic surgeons get together, they still talk about the ques-

tions they were asked. Today there are subtle, not overt, innuendos that she doesn't belong in the field. Some days she is more in tune to it than others, but it definitely exists almost on a daily basis. She says she expects it, but it is not OK.

"I had a great practice in Seattle, so starting over in Sarasota was a risk. My father is a retired physician and he and my mother live in Pennsylvania. We also have family along the east coast of the United States and Florida. We chose Sarasota because it is a good fit for our lifestyle and our three daughters. And almost any place is closer to Pennsylvania than Seattle," she says.

Earning a Bachelor's degree in biology and medical degree at Georgetown University, she completed her residency at the University of Maryland Medical Center and R. Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center. Caroline has been involved in research since her days in medical school and continues to this day. Her research in shoulder and elbow reconstruction has been nationally recognized. Her current research with the University of Washington examines failed shoulder replacements.

Her peer-reviewed articles have been published in the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, the *Journal of Shoulder and Elbow Surgery*, and the *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*. She recently rotated off of a committee of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons after a six-year term. In the summer of 2015 she taught a course in Palm Beach on shoulder surgery including rotator cuff, fractures, and instability in the shoulder and had an article on shoulder arthroplasty published in the *Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research* journal and, eventually, she'd like to spend more time teaching. Caroline is a member of the Association of Clinical Elbow and Shoulder Surgeons and a fellow of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons.

Born in Mineola, New York, to an OB/GYN father and a stay-at-home mother, Caroline was raised in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Always athletic, Caroline was a Level 1 gymnast from ages 5 to 15. Spending afternoons on the Potomac, she was a four-year varsity rower at Georgetown and took up running during medical school. She has run seven Boston Marathons and still runs by herself. Not quite ready to completely leave the Northwest behind, she orders her favorite Stumptown Coffee Roasters coffee for delivery to her house.

Caroline says her husband, Dr. Joseph Chembli, a bariatric surgeon, is hands-down her biggest supporter. They have three daughters: Alexandra, 10 years old; Sophie, 9 years old; and Julianne, 6 years old. All three children attend Sarasota Christian School. Her day starts at 6 a.m. when she gets the girls ready for school followed by surgery or seeing patients at the office. After work she attends her children's activities. Asked about time to eat, she answers, "Eat?"

Caroline wants to be remembered as someone who always took every opportunity, who appreciated every minute of life, and who advanced women's role in medicine. Her persistence and courage are an inspiration to all women who balance a career and family. 

STORY: Carol Darling

IMAGES: Evelyn England