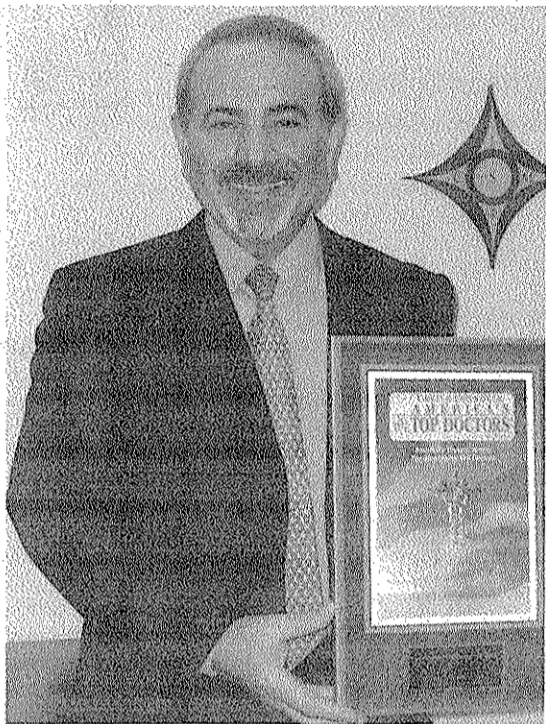


The energy of a medical student



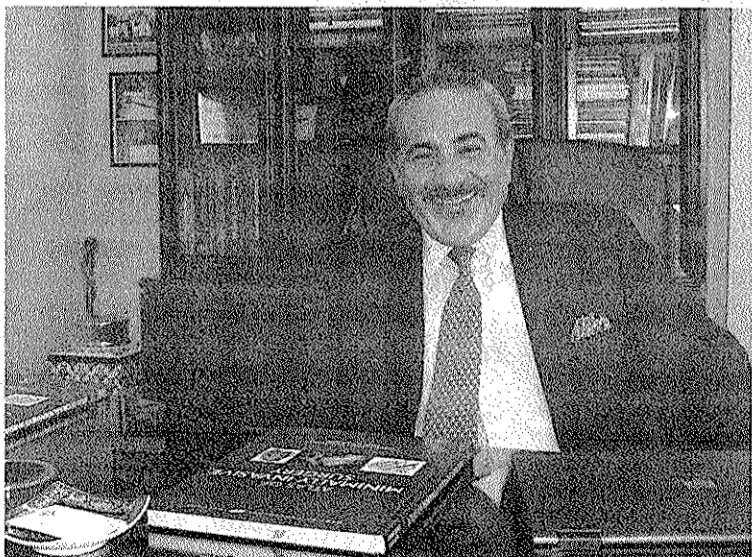
Cyprus' finest: Constantine Frantzides with his latest award

A Cyprus-born medic has been named one of America's top doctors. ELENI ANTONIOU finds out why

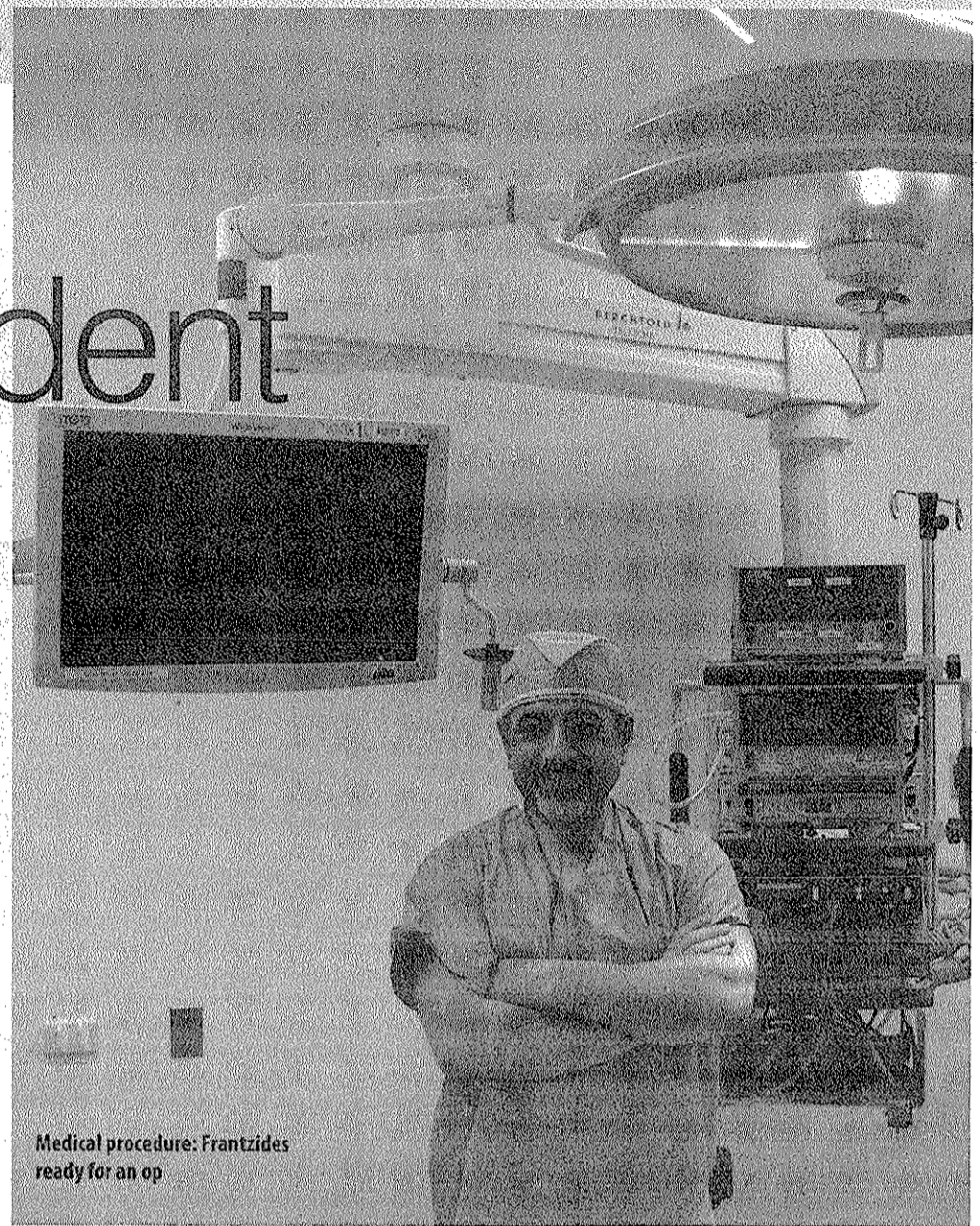
Awarm, welcoming voice says: "Yia sas!" and I am instantly taken aback. I am on the phone to one of the recent winners of America's Top Doctors, Dr Constantine Frantzides, recognising his life's work. And although that sounds like a title from a reality TV show, he is in fact the Director of the Chicago Institute of Minimally Invasive Surgery, Director of the Laparoscopic Fellowship Programme at Saint Francis Hospital and professor of surgery at the University of Illinois. Expecting to be lost for words as I try to work my way through those titles, I am, instead, laughing and listening to fascinating, risible stories about his mother. Although this 59-year-old Cyprus-born medical marvel must surely be a busy man you would never have thought so from his telephone manner.

Before I begin shooting questions at Dr Frantzides, a recipient of multiple awards and honours, he asks me how I am, if my day has been good and where I am from. Not the way I am expecting to be addressed by a man with an impressive sounding resume that includes developing 14 new laparoscopic procedures, but Dr Frantzides isn't like most doctors. He has gained worldwide recognition yet the first thing he says when I ask him how he feels to be on top of the medical world is: "Oh, I got lucky! The timing was good. I was in the right place at the right time, which was when

Like a priest: Frantzides is dedicated to his job in the week



Fast forward seven years and the doctor was back in Cyprus performing the first laparoscopy procedure on the island



Medical procedure: Frantzides ready for an op

the last drastic changes were taking place in my field and I got the opportunity to work at the Institute that gave me the OK to do what I wanted to do." What about hard work? Is that not a factor? "Yes, of course but still I believe I was blessed."

Dr Constantine Frantzides was born and raised in Cyprus but left shortly after completing his national service. He went on to study in Athens and London and then, in 1983, flew to the US where he "planned to conduct research for a couple of years". Instead the young doctor found himself overwhelmed by offers to stay and get involved in "pioneering work".

Fast forward seven years and the doctor was back in Cyprus performing the first laparoscopy procedure on the island. Laparoscopy is an operation performed in the abdomen or pelvis through small incisions with the aid of a camera. It can be used to either inspect and diagnose a condition or to perform surgery. "Returning to Cyprus with my equipment and instruments and being able to offer something that could help was what I am most proud of," he says. "My father, who was a carpenter and my mother, a housewife and seamstress, worked really hard to give me the opportunity to leave and study, so to be able to finally do what I wanted to do, which was also what my parents wanted, was the best feeling."

Dr Frantzides mentions his mother frequently during our interview and embarks on a story that shows how positively he was affected by her. "I was about seven years old when I had to pick a musical instrument to play at school. I chose the mandolin and let's just say I wasn't very good at it. My mother, being the fair person

she was, said, very nicely, five weeks later: 'Son, you have a gift but this isn't it'."

And Dr Frantzides himself has become a family man. He is married with two children; a 22-year-old son studying to become a psychiatrist and a 25-year-old daughter at law school in New York. This area of his life, however, is the only one he would change if he had the opportunity to do it all over again. "I wasn't there when they were growing up," he explains. "I was working and don't remember much of their teenage years, which is difficult to deal with but when you have 126 surgeons under your directorship and you have to keep them all happy, it's hard juggling a family life at the same time. They still bring it up from time to time but now I make the effort to see them, talk with them and spend as much time as possible with them." All this despite working from six in the morning, training students, going to the office, travelling from one Chicago hospital to another, performing procedures and surgery and writing publications. "I am like a priest in his church when I am working," he says. "But I enjoy my weekends."

People who know Dr Frantzides refer to him as a man who glows. He says this is because he loves what he does. "I have a passion and this is it. My operating room is my sanctuary and if I am lucky enough to still be able to do what I love, is there anything better?" His comment on being named one of America's top doctors? "I am flattered by this award but my real rewards are in helping my patients and teaching other surgeons. I am as devoted and energised in my work today as I was on my first day of medical school or the day I decided to become a laparoscopic surgeon."