

Class of 2017: Michael Christie's broken ankle leads to a bright career path healing others

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Grad thankful for mentor who inspired him to pursue kinesiology, connect with patients

By Stephanie Weidmann, Faculty of Kinesiology

June 7, 2017

A broken ankle and a chance encounter with an orthopedic resident changed Michael Christie's life.

He remembers vividly, sitting at the Children's Hospital surrounded by six-year-olds when Dr. Spencer McLean struck up a conversation with him about his post-high school plans.

"I was totally into anatomy and physiology at the time, that's what we were studying in biology. And he brought up the idea of kinesiology. I had never heard of it before — I didn't know what it was. That's when I started looking into it, and now here I am about to graduate," recalls Christie.

It was a fateful meeting for Christie, who, before that day, had been thinking about studying biology in university.

"Spencer said to me, 'Do you like plants?' and I said no. And he said 'Good, plants are boring, study people.' And that's how he segued into talking about kinesiology."

McLean's death in 2013 hit Christie hard, but he still has lessons to learn from the man he considers his mentor.

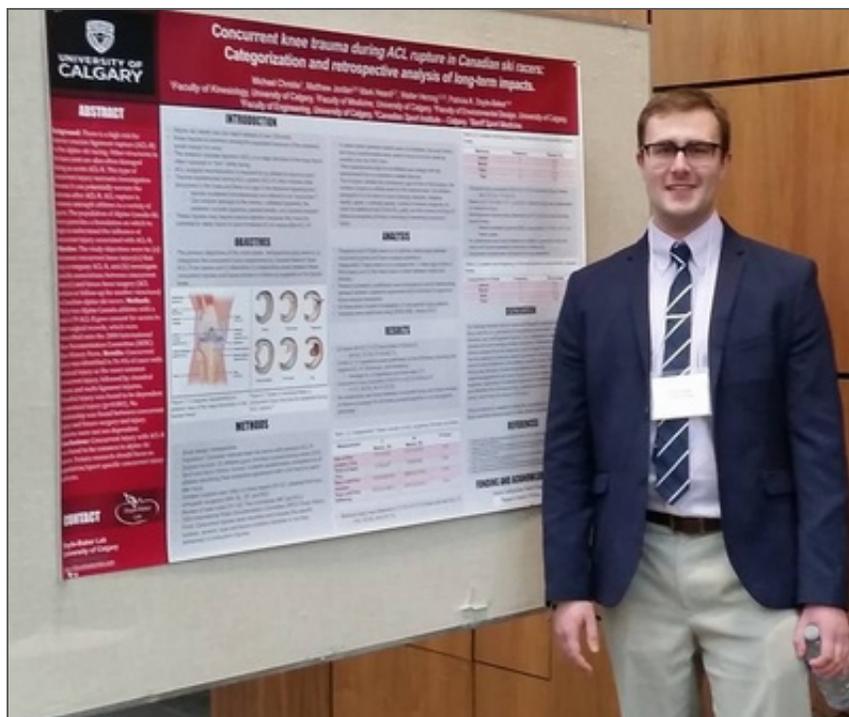
"He (McLean) wrote his resident exams in his hospital bed. He finished it. He didn't stop after the diagnosis," says Christie. "The College of Physicians and Surgeons actually flew out his certificate to present it to him in his hospital bed. So, talk about courage, right? He was this really amazing individual and I think that speaks to the character of this faculty. That's the kind of people who come out of here."

It's McLean's gift for working with people that Christie hopes to cultivate in his own practice as an orthopedic surgeon.

"He had this energy about him. When he was dealing with me as a 17-year-old, he instantly connected, he knew I was in a bad place, I was upset. He had this great way of dealing with people that I aspire to achieve. To connect with people on that level is incredible," says Christie.

Christie, who will either be pursuing a medical degree or a Master in Kinesiology next year, says the UCalgary program helped him understand the importance of mentorship and collaboration.

"I think one of the great things about kinesiology is that it's very collaborative. There were so many opportunities to work with fellow undergrads, graduate students and professors.



Michael Christie presents on concurrent injury that occurs with ACL tears in ski racers at the University of Alberta's Research Revealed Undergraduate Conference in March 2017. His supervisor is Tish Doyle-Baker in the Faculty of Kinesiology.

When I first came, I thought it would be more like, you're on your own, but that's not how they do things in kinesiology. It's a team effort and that really enhances your learning because you get that mentorship aspect," says Christie.

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For Christie, academic success is important, but without the ability to connect to patients the way McLean did, he won't become the surgeon he truly wants to be.

"I think the most important thing is that you can have really brilliant people who are strong academics but there's another half to life, and that's working with people," says Christie. "Learning how to work with patients, that will be something that I'll take with me for the rest of my life. Working with people and forming that connection is really vital to the work that you do, because without it, you're not going to get very far."



Michael Christie brushes up on his blood pressure measurement at a clinical skills workshop — a skill he says he first learned in his second year as a kinesiology student.

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