



# MAGIC MOMENTS



**TAKING A LOOK AT THE MANY ALTRUISTIC MAGIC PROJECTS AND PEOPLE ACROSS THE GLOBE.**

THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO DAVID ELKIN, THE FOUNDER OF MAGICAID IN THE USA.

**JAY:** Hi David, great to talk. Tell the readers a bit about yourself.

**DAVID:** Hi Jay. I am currently a third year medical student. The path I took to get here was pretty circuitous but it definitely provided me with a lot of great life experience and I wouldn't have had it any other way. I went from performing magic professionally to working in the film industry to working as a software engineer in the tech business world, and then finally wound up pursuing medicine. I guess you could say I'm a jack of all trades but master of none. I also genuinely like and care about people. I'm always the person to greet random people walking by or start conversations with others because I'm curious and want to get to know them. I believe in spreading kindness and being nice to others, and that's the main idea behind MagicAid.

**JAY:** A great philosophy. How did you become interested in magic?

**DAVID:** My mom used to buy me magic kits all the time when I was a kid so magic has always been a part of my life in some way. It wasn't until middle school, when my mom hired a magician for my bar mitzvah, that I really became interested. Concurrently, I always loved playing games, especially card games. I used to carry around a deck of cards with me all the time. I loved discovering ways of cheating at cards and used to practise second deals, greek deals, bottom deals, and different false shuffles and cuts. Early high school, I had friends who also did magic. We all auditioned for the Magic Castle and I was accepted as a junior member. I started performing gigs and the rest is history.

**JAY:** How did your love of magic conspire to using it for healing and comforting?

**DAVID:** I became a volunteer at a local hospital during high school, where I carried out routine procedures such as discharging patients, transporting specimens, and training other volunteers. During one of my nighttime shifts, I was called to Pediatrics to copy a medical chart and saw a young girl crying in her hospital bed. I talked to her and learned that she was fearfully awaiting a tonsillectomy. I tried to calm her by talking and joking with her. I also pulled out a deck of cards that I always carried and showed her a magic trick. She enjoyed the trick and asked for more. During the next few illusions, she forgot the worries about her impending procedure for a little while. I was amazed at how

much joy it brought to the both of us. This chance meeting made me realise that I could combine my love of magic with my passion for helping people. It was then that I decided to start a programme called MagicAid, with the mission to relieve patients of some of their health worries by entertaining them and teaching them various magical effects. I continued performing magic at the hospital every Friday night throughout high school and in recognition for my work with MagicAid was fortunate to earn a partial college scholarship, was featured on ABC 7 Eyewitness News, and received several awards from the city of Los Angeles and the state of California.

**JAY:** Until that moment, had you an idea of the power of magic used in this way?

**DAVID:** I didn't know how much of an effect doing magic tricks for patients could actually have until I read about studies in which researchers followed the treatments of multiple cancer patients, and found that all other factors being the same, the patients who had a positive outlook on life were most likely to survive following the treatments. I was astounded at how powerful the mind really is; that a patient who exhibits a positive mental attitude can improve his or her chances for recovery. Although medicinal treatment does most of the work, I was eager to learn how much of an impact the mind actually has over the body. I brought MagicAid to Stony Brook when I started medical school here in 2014. The most powerful moment experience I had through MagicAid was when I performed for this one boy with terminal brain cancer. He and his parents loved having me come to perform and teach magic. I ended up visiting him every day for over a month until the day he passed away. The bond that I experienced with him and his family was powerful beyond words and further motivated me to continue in my mission.

**JAY:** How has MagicAid grown since its inception?

**DAVID:** The organisation has grown to over 50 members, comprising mostly of medical students, as well as some residents and attending physicians. We provide magic therapy weekly to a total of over 1500 children on the Pediatrics units as well as in the Pediatrics ER. We also purchase magic tricks and pass them out to kids and teach them how to perform. By knowing the secret behind the magic effect, it gives them a sense of control in an environment they otherwise have no control in. They love showing their doctors, nurses, family members and friends the new tricks that they have learned. We have also started working on research projects with various departments.

**JAY:** That's amazing work David. Who are your inspirations?

**DAVID:** [Laughs] So this might sound like an odd mix but my biggest role models are my mother and Neil Patrick Harris. My mom got into a serious car accident when I was a baby and broke her back. While in

recovery, she also went through a divorce and became a single mother. Still, she fought and got through it. She started her own business and raised me and my sister by herself. She's an extremely strong person and amazing role model and she encouraged me to go into medicine. Given what she went through, she inspired me that I could do anything I wanted to do as well. I worked with Neil Patrick Harris on the committee at the Magic Castle in Hollywood. He had so much going on in his life between family and work. He took on so many projects and still performed 100% at each one. He provided me with the courage to pursue multiple projects and ventures in life including medicine and magic.

**JAY:** Do you perform as a paid magician at any functions outside of MagicAid?

**DAVID:** I really haven't had time to perform outside of MagicAid since becoming a medical student. Times that I'm not performing for MagicAid, I'm training other members to be able to perform.

I'm still a member of the AMA and visit the Magic Castle any time I'm back home in LA. Haven't met many magicians in the NY area, although I would like to. Again, given the time constraints with medical school, this has been difficult to do.

**JAY:** As an altruistic magician, have you encountered any support from other magicians?

**DAVID:** I hadn't shared much about MagicAid with the magic community but ever since the NBC story came out...

**JAY:** Yeah, that's how I discovered your work.

**DAVID:** Indeed, and since then I've been getting quite a few messages from magicians across the country showing their support and wanting to get involved! I have received requests from magicians to be able to come and perform for the kids as well. The thing that makes MagicAid different is that we customise the magic therapy to a patient's needs so the performers are all healthcare providers in order for that to work. Down the line, once we expand to other locations, I would love help from the magic community in helping train healthcare providers on



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techniques and on how to perform.

**JAY:** Do you have more interest from other medical experts to whom you teach a trick or two?

**DAVID:** Yes! The feedback from the medical/healthcare community has been incredible. Even before the NBC segment aired, I had all sorts of medical professionals reaching out to me and wanting to get involved and learn some magic that they could do for their patients. A lot of medical professionals share my belief that magic therapy can be its own new field of medicine and are very excited about collaborating on research projects together. I've taught magic to doctors, nurses, occupational/physical therapists, and they all love sharing it with their patients, and see the impact that it makes!

**JAY:** Magic and medicine is certainly a fascinating field. How do you see the effects of your magic on the patients; is it just for that moment or does it create an expectancy? Does it even help their healing process? Where do you stand on magic as medicine? Ha! Three questions in one there!

**DAVID:** [Laughs] Magic stimulates a part of the brain that rarely functions in our daily lives, acting as a medium through which we suspend our disbelief and allow our imaginations to run free. Magic makes the impossible seem possible. I'd like to think that it provides the patient with a subconscious hope that their recovery is just as possible. Magic is also different because it actively engages the patient's mind and gives them some control over an



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environment that they otherwise have very little control in. Patients at a hospital feel helpless, but learning how to perform a magic trick and then knowing the secret when others don't and performing it for their friends, family members, doctors,

and nurses, gives them a feeling of power and that makes a huge difference. Patients don't "see" the medicine working and they don't "see" the magic happening. For many kids, magic is medicine.

**JAY:** How do you see your future with your MagicAid project?

**DAVID:** There are so many applications of magic therapy to medicine. That's why we're all about "bridging magic and medicine...one smile at a time". More importantly our overall message is about spreading kindness and making someone else's day just a little bit better, whether that includes magic or not. We are hoping to continue with our research efforts and be integrated into the gold standard of patient-centered care in medicine. We would like to expand to hospitals and medical schools across the country. Many doctors treat their patients as numbers and forget that they are taking care of other people with families and friends of their own. I love connecting with people, and building relationships with them. I'm curious where people came from in their lives, how they got to where they are now, and where they would like to go in the future. Being a doctor allows me to bring that human touch back into medicine. I am able to connect with people at their worst and help them get better and back on track with their lives. Rather than just treating the body

with medications, I hope to treat the mind and soul through human connection. This is what MagicAid is all about.

**JAY:** That's a great vision. What's the website for magicians who may be keen to find out more?

**DAVID:** My website is [www.magic-aid.org](http://www.magic-aid.org)

My facebook is [www.facebook.com/magicaid](http://www.facebook.com/magicaid)

My twitter is @magicaid

My e-mail address is [contact@magic-aid.org](mailto:contact@magic-aid.org)

I look forward to connecting with magicians from all over the world!

**JAY:** Nice one. I'm sure there are many like-minded magicians who are perhaps feeling the urge to jump in and use their magic holistically. On the wards, what is your favourite 'go to' piece of gift magic?

**DAVID:** I love doing magic that is highly interactive with my patients. My opener is usually a sponge ball routine because it instantly immerses the patient into the experience where they become a part of the show!

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