

# DLMP Heritage Appreciation - Ramadan

*Dr. Kenneth Chen spent his early childhood in Fuzhou, China before returning home to Brooklyn, NY. He studied neuroscience and biochemistry at the University of Delaware and then taught high school chemistry in the underserved Chicago area. He later completed his DO and PhD in a combined program at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Currently, Dr. Chen is an anatomic and clinical pathology resident at the University of Washington Medical Center, where he also serves as one of the chiefs. He is set to continue his fellowship training in hematopathology and molecular genetic pathology at UW.*



**BITANIA WONDIMU, MD**  
INTERVIEWER

**Bitania Wondimu:** For our third month celebrating Heritage Month, it's my pleasure to interview Dr. Kenn Chen, one of our fantastic APCP residents and one of the current CP chiefs. Thanks for joining me, Kenn.

**Kenn Chen:** Thanks for having me, Bitania. It's great to be here.

**Bitania Wondimu:** To start off, can you tell us a little bit about what you've been working on lately or what you've been passionate about?

**Kenn Chen:** Sure, sure. Currently, in my personal life, I've got two little kids at the age of 2 and under running around at home, which keeps me very busy. We're just coming off a bit of cold season, so it's been a lot to manage. On the work front, I've been juggling a few research projects, mostly in hematopathology, with a focus on lymphoma-related work. I'm excited to develop those and get them moving forward. Other than that, I'm in the grind like everyone else—studying for APCP boards and steadily making my way through the last year of residency. Graduation is coming up fast!

**Bitania Wondimu:** Sounds busy! Can you share a bit about your journey into pathology?

**Kenn Chen:** That's a great question. Honestly, pathology wasn't on my radar when I started medical school. Initially, I leaned toward family medicine because I wanted to practice in community settings. Before med school, I worked for a few years in Chicago's inner-city schools and felt a strong passion for continuity of care with families and children. But toward the end of my third year of medical school, I did a rotation in pathology. Sitting at the microscope, I fell in love with the nature of the work—especially the morphology. At first, it was tough to imagine not being in a patient-facing role. But after talking with other pathologists and learning how they found meaningful connections outside of the typical clinical setting, I began to feel more settled with the idea of pursuing pathology.

**Bitania Wondimu:** How has the journey been since then? Do you have a clear idea of what you want to do career-wise?

**Kenn Chen:** It's been a great learning experience. Early on, I thought I wanted to become a neuropathologist, but someone advised me to consider general APCP training first, and I'm glad I listened.

That broader foundation helped me discover my interest in hematopathology, which I'll be pursuing in fellowship next year. Following that, I'm also planning to complete a fellowship in molecular genetic pathology, both here at the University of Washington.

**Bitania Wondimu:** That's exciting! You mentioned earlier some of the helpful advice along your journey. Can you talk about some of your mentors and the impact they've had on you?

**Kenn Chen:** Absolutely. One mentor who stands out is Dr. Sattar, the author of Pathoma.

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**Kenn Chen:** His work has been instrumental for so many of us during Step 1. I had the chance to meet him while I was in Chicago. Despite his busy schedule, he generously carved out time to talk to me. I asked him how he dealt with not being in a patient-facing role. He shared that he finds fulfillment in his community work, particularly within Chicago's Muslim community. That conversation gave me comfort—it reminded me there's meaningful work you can do for others, even beyond your professional responsibilities.

**Bitania Wondimu:** That's so true. Mentors play such an important role, and it's evident how much his guidance helped you. Beyond mentorship, you mentioned community service earlier. Is that something you've incorporated into your life or hope to pursue more?

**Kenn Chen:** It's definitely something I hope to do more of. Right now, residency keeps me very busy, so it's been limited. But during med school in Philadelphia, I helped set up a program that introduced girls in underserved communities to careers in medicine. I'd love to work on similar initiatives to engage high school students—especially those who might not see medicine as an option due to a lack of resources or exposure.

I still mentor a few students individually, but I'd like to have a larger role in organized efforts. Early exposure is key, and I think it's crucial for kids from diverse backgrounds to see people like themselves succeeding in fields like medicine or STEM.

**Bitania Wondimu:** Representation and mentorship make such a difference. On the topic of representation, what do you think we, as pathologists or even the broader medical community, can do to improve diversity and engagement?

**Kenn Chen:** I think early outreach is essential. Partnerships with schools—even elementary schools—could make a big impact. Many kids, particularly in underserved areas, are already behind by the time they reach high school. Introducing them to opportunities in medicine, engineering, or science early on could help foster interest.

**Kenn Chen:** On an institutional level, I think departments like ours are making strides in hiring people from diverse backgrounds. But the need for diversity still extends across medicine more broadly. It's encouraging to see progress, but there's still more to be done—especially in connecting with the next generation.

**Bitania Wondimu:** That's a great perspective, especially hearing it from someone who's worked with students firsthand. Shifting the focus back to your personal path—are there any achievements or challenges you'd like to share from your journey?

**Kenn Chen:** Training itself can be daunting, especially as pathology isn't something you're exposed to much in clinical rotations. The learning curve was steep initially. Balancing that with starting a family—having kids during residency—was definitely a challenge. From a personal perspective, as a Chinese-American Muslim, balancing my professional responsibilities with religious obligations, like finding time to pray five times a day or attend Friday prayers, has been another challenge. But I've managed and even found that stepping away briefly to pray helps ground me during busy days. As for accomplishments, I'm proud of making it to the fourth year of residency, staying on top of things while juggling family life and faith, and securing some grant awards for research. Hopefully, I'll cross the finish line strong!

**Bitania Wondimu:** You definitely will—no doubt about it. Thank you for sharing that. Speaking of balancing faith and training, can you talk more about how being a Muslim has shaped your experience?

**Kenn Chen:** Of course. I accepted Islam in 2017 while in grad school in Philadelphia. It was a big transition, to say the least. Being a convert meant learning everything from the ground up—praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, and practicing other religious obligations. Thankfully, finding time to pray during residency has been manageable. Prayers don't take long, just 5-10 minutes, so I'll excuse myself, pray, and then get back to work. It's actually very refreshing and helps me refocus during the day.

**Bitania Wondimu:** That's great to hear. I imagine Ramadan is a meaningful time for you and your family. Are there any special traditions or dishes you all enjoy?

**Kenn Chen:** Definitely. Ramadan is a special time in so many ways. While fasting from dawn to sunset is challenging, it brings a lot of blessings. The food during Ramadan is incredible. My in-laws are Taiwanese Muslims with roots in Saudi Arabia, so our family enjoys a mix of Chinese and Middle Eastern dishes. Hand-pulled noodles and lamb over rice—called kabsa—are some of my favorites. And then there are the desserts, which are endless! In previous years, I've also celebrated Eid with my in-laws in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Spending time in Mecca during that period is truly a breathtaking experience, praying and celebrating Eid with millions of people from all over the world. It's a powerful reminder of the global community we're all part of.

**Bitania Wondimu:** That sounds so beautiful. One last question to wrap things up: What advice or words of wisdom would you like to share with the DLMP community or anyone interested in pursuing pathology?

**Kenn Chen:** One of the virtues emphasized in Ramadan is the importance of intention. Every action we take begins with an intention, and the sincerity of that intention can magnify its impact. For example, when driving to work, I remind myself of my intention to help patients—even in small ways. At the microscope, it's easy to get lost in routine, but I try to remember there's a person at the other end who will benefit from what I'm doing.

This mindful practice gives purpose to each moment, and it's something I strive to carry not just during Ramadan, but throughout the year.

**Bitania Wondimu:** That's such powerful advice, for all of us to remember. Thank you for sharing that—and for taking the time to talk with me today.

**Kenn Chen:** Thank you for having me! It's been a pleasure.

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