

Rave Reviews

David McCallum

Actor

For more than 50 years, stage, screen, and television actor David McCallum has been chasing bad guys, solving murder mysteries, and making female viewers swoon. In his spare time, the accomplished musician has also produced several albums. For the past eight years, he has played medical examiner Dr. Donald "Ducky" Mallard in the number one hit series *NCIS*, becoming proficient in forensic pathology for the role. While filming takes place on the West Coast, Mr. McCallum calls New York City his home, having moved here with his wife, Katherine, following completion of his first number one hit show, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*

"It was through Katherine that I was introduced to everything medical in New York and indeed HSS," says Mr. McCallum. "I can't remember which one of us got there first but we worked with Dr. Bohne – a good friend and a superb doctor. He has probably treated every single member of my family."

Growing up, Mr. McCallum played the oboe. He gave up music to become an actor, but continued to develop his musical acumen. "When I discovered that the pinky finger on my right hand was beginning to curl, I sought medical counsel," notes Mr. McCallum. He was told that he had Dupuytren's contracture, a progressive shrinkage of the connective tissue in the palm of the hand that can make fingers curl in. Not only would it make it difficult to navigate the keys of the oboe, Dupuytren's would affect filming of medical scenes with close-ups of the hands – a key image if you're playing a doctor on TV.

"I let it go for quite a long time," he notes. "But when I accompanied Katherine to an appointment with Dr. Carlson, she happened to notice my finger and told me that she could fix it. And so she did."

"The only approved treatment right now for Dupuytren's is surgery," explains Michelle G. Carlson, MD. "You go in and remove scar tissue and straighten out the joints that have become contracted. David did very well. Half of it was surgical and half of it was his work in therapy afterwards. The surgery is pretty quick – a two-hour procedure. It's the rehab that takes



Dr. Michelle G. Carlson corrected David McCallum's Dupuytren's contracture, which causes a fixed flexion contracture of the finger. At left: Dupuytren's contracture after release through an incision in the palm, restoring the ability to fully extend the finger.

time and is something that I can't do for patients. Participation in therapy is especially important with hand surgery. Patients need to be 'on-board' with that. David totally was. He did the work required after surgery to get a good result."

"Working as an actor playing a pathologist, and having studied pathology for eight years, I know what's happening to my body, which is an insight that most people don't have," says Mr. McCallum, who has been made an honorary medical examiner of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. "Their chief pathologist told me it was because I'm the only one on television who really tries to keep it as accurate as possible. That is my mandate. If the dialogue says it's one kind of x-ray but they give me the wrong one, I ask, 'what do you want to change – the x-ray or the dialogue?'"

"I do try to keep it right, but it did get to the point of obsession," he jokes. "People now believe I think of myself as a medical examiner who sometimes acts."

But when he's the patient, Mr. McCallum says, "I have a rule of thumb that if I cut myself, bump myself, or do anything at all – no matter where I am in the United States – I head straight for Hospital for Special Surgery. I feel that it is, without exception, the one place where I know that I'm going to get fixed, and in the best possible way. I am confident that anytime I have a medical condition that requires attention within HSS, I'll be able to give its performance rave reviews." ♦



On the set of *NCIS*: David McCallum, as Dr. Donald "Ducky" Mallard, has learned so much about anatomy that it has helped him understand some of his own medical issues. The only concern is that his co-stars think he's forgotten that he only plays the part of a pathologist.