

## Katie Atkins, MD, PhD, radiation oncologist

### How has your personal background influenced your career?

I grew up in a small town in Oregon called Lorane and, until college, I always was in very small schools. I've always really liked the feeling of having a community. I even had that same sense of community in college because I played basketball and the team was my community. As I moved forward academically, it was always really important to me that I enjoyed my team and my community. In radiation oncology, with the multidisciplinary team that you have, it feels similar. This specialty really illustrates a team approach to medicine.

### What are the chief challenges you have faced in your career?

Early on, the idea of just even getting into medical school was a daunting task. Part of it was that I came from small schools. I felt like I had a lot of catching up to do. So I had insecurities about whether I had the right academic background to do this and to be successful in medicine. It took time for me to feel comfortable and feel that I belonged.

A year ago, while I was a chief resident, I had a baby, and I think that having a baby as a resident, a trainee, comes with a host of challenges.

### Could you say more about how you chose your area of specialization?

When I started medical school, I actually had no idea what radiation oncology was and I really didn't have a set idea of what specialty I wanted to go into. I did a combined MD-PhD program. When I was working on my PhD, which was in a basic science cell biology lab, I had a meeting with radiation oncology researchers and the radiation medicine department chair at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). And the department chair asked me, "Are you interested in radiation oncology?" At that time, I had been starting to get interested in oncology from the research side and thought I wanted to look into it clinically. But after that meeting, I started working with the radiation oncology department while doing my research and kept up those ties. Then I did a clinical rotation in that field when I went back into medical school. And as soon as I worked there, I felt like, "These are my people, these are the people I want to work with."

### Who has deeply influenced your career?

I don't think I would have discovered radiation oncology at the right time had it not been for Dr. Charles Thomas Jr., the chair of radiation medicine at OHSU. He is someone who recruits like a coach. And I mean that in all the positive ways. He's a mentor. On the personal side, I would say my husband, Bobby Caldwell. We've been together almost 16 years, and through the whole time, he has been unwavering in his support of my career trajectory.



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