

Dr. Warren Conrad Breidenbach, III, MD, MSc, FRCS(C), FACS

Founding Father of VCA and Pioneer in Reconstructive Transplantation

Dr. Warren Conrad Breidenbach III, a true pioneer in the field of Vascularized Composite Allotransplantation (VCA), has left an indelible mark on the world of reconstructive surgery. Born on June 21, 1946, in San Francisco, California, into a family of distinguished physicians, Dr. Breidenbach pursued a career that would redefine the possibilities of transplantation and reconstructive surgery. His grandfather Warren Conrad Breidenbach I (1894-1942) and father, Warren Conrad Breidenbach II (1920-1998), were both physicians. His father was a three-time All-American who graduated with an MD from Harvard Medical School.

After earning his Doctor of Medicine from the University of Calgary in 1975, Dr. Breidenbach trained in Plastic Surgery at McGill University Hospital and completed a groundbreaking microsurgery fellowship at Eastern Virginia Medical School, where he conducted seminal work on vascularized nerve grafts. In 1983, he joined the Christine M. Kleinert Institute of Hand Surgery in Louisville, KY, where he trained and mentored over 500 fellows in hand and microsurgery during his 22-year tenure as Clinical Professor of Plastic Surgery at the University of Louisville.

Dr. Breidenbach's visionary leadership and relentless pursuit of innovation culminated in the establishment of the composite tissue allotransplantation (hand transplant) program at Jewish Hospital in 1997, in partnership with Kleinert and Kutz Hand Care Center and the University of Louisville. In 1999, he led the team that performed the first successful hand transplant in the United States on Matthew Scott, a landmark achievement that defied widespread skepticism and criticism from his peers and surgical community at large. January 25, 2025, marks the 26-year anniversary of Matthew Scott, making him the recipient of the longest surviving hand transplant in the world.

His pioneering work did not stop with the first hand transplant. Dr. Breidenbach's leadership helped expand the field of VCA to include face, abdominal wall, uterus, genitourinary, and tracheo-laryngeal transplants, now clinical realities worldwide. His mentorship and influence shaped the careers of many fellows who became Department Chairs or Division Chiefs in Plastic, Hand or Microsurgery across the world and several who went on to lead hand transplant programs.

Dr. Breidenbach's contributions to the field are too extensive to list. In 1991, he co-founded the American Society for Peripheral Nerve, the world's largest society of peripheral nerve surgeons. He also served as the Founding President of the American Society for Reconstructive Transplantation (ASRT) in 2008 and became the first President of the International Society for Vascularized Composite Allotransplantation (ISVCA) in 2002, establishing global platforms dedicated to advancing reconstructive transplantation.

In his later career, Dr. Breidenbach continued his groundbreaking work, serving as Chief of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the University of Arizona and later at the University of Texas in San Antonio. As the founding father of VCA and reconstructive transplantation, Dr. Warren C. Breidenbach III's legacy of unwavering dedication, pioneering innovation, mentorship, and perseverance continue to inspire new generations of surgeons and researchers worldwide.