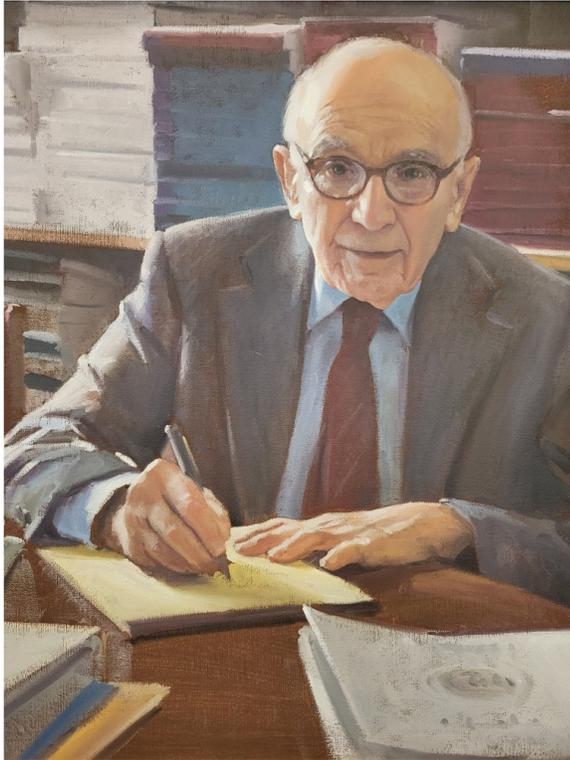




# Irving M. London



*Photographic image of the painted portrait of Irving M. London hanging in the Tosteson Medical Education Center (TMEC), Harvard Medical School*

Irving M. London, MD, was born in Malden, Massachusetts on July 24, 1918, the son of Russian Jewish parents. He recalled an early brush with significant illness when at the age of five he contracted polio encephalitis. This experience did not spark his later interest in medicine, however. Instead, Dr. London explained that his first medical role model was the cardiologist Sam Levine, who came to their house to take care of his sister. Dr. Levine's intelligence, compassion and racoon fur winter coat made a lasting impression on young Irving.

After attending Malden public schools, Dr. London entered Harvard College. Thanks to a scholarship from Harvard and a National Youth Administration library job, Dr. London was able to cover his tuition and room and board fees comfortably, living on campus at Lowell House in the midst of the Great Depression. He developed lasting friendships with

his room and floor mates, including James Tobin, who later won the Nobel Prize for Economics; Ralph Murphy, vice president of the University of Pennsylvania; and Richard Finn, a leading figure in the State Department. Emblematic of his prodigious capacity for hard work, Dr. London simultaneously earned a second bachelor's degree from Hebrew College in Roxbury in 1938.

One of Dr. London's proudest accomplishments at Harvard was participating on the Harvard Student Refugee Committee. In outraged response to *Kristallnacht*, a number of students from several undergraduate groups, including London, then president of the Harvard Avukah Society, organized, raised money and brought a total of 14 refugee students from Nazi-occupied Europe to Harvard (2 additional students were brought over to Radcliffe). One of those refugees, Walter Pick, MD, became a classmate of London's at Harvard Medical School.

After graduating from Harvard with a Bachelor of Arts degree, *summa cum laude*, in 1939, Dr. London

*In tribute to their dedicated efforts to science and medicine, deceased members of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine (those at the rank of full or emeritus professor) receive a review of their life and contributions with a complete reflection, a **Memorial Minute**.*

entered Harvard Medical School. However, due to some misgivings during his first year he applied, was accepted and given a scholarship to Harvard Law School. When the Law School learned he had not withdrawn from the Medical School, they forced him to make a decision. He sought advice and received counsel from Felix Frankfurter, then a Law Professor and later a distinguished Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court, who Irving recalled saying “Tell that young man to stop agonizing. He can make a contribution, a valuable contribution in either field. Tell him to decide and get down to work.” With this, Irving decided to give medical school a trial for another year. In his second year of medical school he became a student research assistant in the laboratory of Hermann Blumgart, assessing myocardial fibrosis in patients with coronary disease. London stated it was this experience that hooked him on research; that, combined with his experience caring for patients on the wards cemented his desire to pursue a career in academic medicine. After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1943, he began his internship in medicine at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, but was interrupted by World War II. Dr. London served as an Army captain in the Medical Corps, conducting research that showed the efficacy of the drug chloroquine against malaria. He also served as the physician for the Congressional delegation to the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific. While waiting for the delegation to arrive, he was assigned to find the source of an outbreak of dysentery on one of the ships anchored at Bikini. The lieutenant commander sent to assist him in the lab was George Packer Berry, a future dean of Harvard Medical School.

After the war, Dr. London returned to New York to finish out his residency in medicine while completing a post-doctoral fellowship in the department of biochemistry at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. Under the tutelage of David Rittenberg, he applied novel stable isotope techniques to understand protein turnover *in vivo*, making seminal observations on red cell kinetics and lifespan in health and disease. This combined program was quite unusual at the time, and London gave credit to Dr. Robert Loeb, the chair of medicine, for his support. He subsequently joined the faculty, continuing his research, teaching and clinical service.

Dr. London’s lifelong love of France began in 1939, when he spent time in the country on a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship. He subsequently made several trips to Paris to present his research; in 1949, he met his future wife, Huguette Piedzicki, there. They married in 1955 and settled in New York in the Bronx. They had two sons, Robert (“Robb”) and David. Mrs. London was an accomplished painter, and her work filled their home. Dr. London was fluent in her native tongue, and enjoyed engaging in conversations in French whenever possible.

In 1954, Dr. London was asked to help establish a new medical school and become the founding chair of the department of medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. He was 36 years old. He served as professor and chair of the department, and directed medical services at the Bronx Municipal Hospital Center, from 1955 until 1970. Dr. London noted that he sought out the combination of science and clinical medicine, and the participation of students in research as medical students, in future academic endeavors; medicine permeated by science was what they wanted at Einstein.

In 1967, while meeting with the search committee for the chair of medicine position at Boston City Hospital, Dr. London learned of discussions between Harvard University and the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology for a new entity. Subsequently Professor Jerome Weisner, the provost of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Dr. Robert Ebert, dean of Harvard Medical School, reached out to London to serve as a consultant to the two institutions to assist in the planning of a joint program. The consultancy turned into a sabbatical year in Cambridge to map out a plan for the joint venture and to engage faculty at both MIT and HMS in support of the program. After receiving approval from both universities to proceed, Dr. London was offered an opportunity to direct this new collaboration, The Harvard-MIT Program in Health Sciences and Technology. After much soul-searching, given Dr. London's responsibilities in New York and the family's initial reluctance to leave the City, he agreed to take on this role. The opportunity to create a new joint institutional entity, bringing together two great universities, proved irresistible, and Dr. London took up leadership of HST in 1970. The first class of biomedical sciences students matriculated in 1971; in 1978, the MD program was joined by the Medical Engineering and Medical Physics PhD program, which produces superbly trained engineers and scientists interested in developing innovations in the treatment of human disease.

Health Sciences and Technology is the longest surviving collaboration between Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dr. London served as director of HST until he stepped down in 1985. He was professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and professor of biology at MIT, the first scholar to ever hold such a dual appointment. His lab, which studied the molecular regulation of hemoglobin synthesis at the level of gene transcription and translation into protein, was also located at MIT, first in Building 16 and ultimately in E25. He co-created the course HST 140 Biochemical Basis of Clinical Disorders (now Molecular Medicine) with his friend and colleague Dr. Paul Gallop in 1979, and continued to co-direct this seminar course, lastly with Drs. George Daley and David Cohen, right up until his death. He noted that the course was part of his continuing education with its lineup of stellar faculty, and kept him enjoyably engaged. The HST London Academic Society at HMS was named for him in 2009.

Dr. London was the recipient of numerous awards and honors for his pioneering research on hemoglobin synthesis and regulation. These include the Welch Fellowship in Internal Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences from 1949-1952, the Theobald Smith Award in Medical Sciences of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1953, the Commonwealth Fund Fellowship at Institut Pasteur from 1962-1963, election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1963, president of the American Society for Clinical Investigation from 1963-1964, charter membership in the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences in 1970, and elected membership in the National Academy of Sciences in 1971. From 1982-2003, he served first on the board of directors and then on the Biosciences Advisory Committee of the pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson.

Dr. London remained passionate about HST until the end. He rarely missed an HST event, and especially enjoyed speaking with the students about their research and other interests. He was also quite proud of his grandchildren, Jacob and Danielle, both of whom attended MIT. When he passed away on May 23, 2018, he was looking forward to celebrating his 100th birthday with family and friends in July, and the 50th anniversary of HST in 2020. As Dr. London noted in his chapter on the early years of HST in [The Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology: The First 25 Years 1970-1985](#), "By seeking to bring to bear on medical education and research the full range of the sciences

basic to medicine, one can hope to produce physician-scientists and medical engineers and physicists who continue to grow intellectually throughout their professional lives, who advance the scientific and technologic base of medicine, and who are dedicated to humane professional service in our society. I believe that this major goal of HST has served us well and should continue to guide us in the future.” While the pandemic has postponed the celebration, a review of the program is in progress to develop the HST MD curriculum of the future. Irving London would have reveled in the planning, and would have been honored to contribute to the next 50 years of the program that owes so much to his enlightened leadership.

Respectfully submitted,

George Q. Daley, MD, PhD, *Chair*

David E. Cohen, MD, PhD

Patricia A. Cunningham