



Alan Aisenberg



Alan Aisenberg, MD, PhD, died on October 27, 2013 after a long and distinguished career in oncology at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School. Dr. Aisenberg was born in New York City in 1926, attended and graduated from Harvard College and Columbia Physicians and Surgeons School of Medicine. He served his residency in internal medicine at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital and obtained his PhD in Immunology from the University of Wisconsin, then joined the Department of Hematology and Oncology at MGH in 1961.

With a background in basic immunology, he became intrigued by Hodgkin's Disease, a poorly understood lymphoma associated with notable immune defects. His early work at MGH documented a profound loss of response to bacterial antigens (pneumococcal and tubercular), and delayed hypersensitivity antigens. His entry into the field of lymphoma therapy coincided with the development of curative radiation therapy for early disease by Kaplan at Stanford and Peters at the University of Toronto, and the first curative therapy of advanced disease with combination chemotherapy by De Vita, Canellos, and colleagues

at the National Cancer Institute. Dr. Aisenberg authored authoritative reviews of progress in the lymphoma field in the *New England Journal* in 1973 and again 1978, in which he called particular attention to the late toxicities caused by drugs (leukemia, pulmonary fibrosis) and irradiation (secondary malignancies). His writing was notable for its balanced view, its focus on long term outcomes, and its breadth of expertise. He continued to work in the lymphoma field, making important contributions by alerting cancer doctors to persistent immunologic defects and the late occurrence of breast cancer in women treated with mediastinal irradiation. As Dr. Canellos, a long time colleague at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, noted in his response to a Letter to the Editor by Aisenberg in the *NEJM* in 1993, these toxicities of drugs and irradiation give impetus to the lymphoma researchers to find less toxic modalities, a goal now being achieved through redesign of regimens, reduced intensity treatment, and new therapeutic modalities.

This writer (BAC) joined Dr. Aisenberg at MGH in 1995 and admired his incisive thoughts about progress in our field. He was slow to hop on band wagons but always appreciative of first-rate science and well-done clinical research. His wry smile and laughter, with a touch of skepticism, enlightened our frequent conversations. I will remember seeing Dr. Aisenberg, a tall, distinguished gentleman, aboard his bicycle weaving around traffic on Cambridge Street on his way to work. He loved biking to MGH from his historic home on Beacon Hill, and continued that routine into his 80's.

Dr. Aisenberg's wife of 47 years, Nadya, preceded him in death. He is survived by his children James and Margaret, both doctors, as well as three grandchildren. He is remembered fondly by his many former fellows and his patients as a devoted physician and scholar.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce A. Chabner M.D., *chairperson*
George P. Canellos, M.D.