



Lee Baer



Photograph courtesy of Carol Ann Baer

Lee Baer was born on August 24, 1955 in Brooklyn, New York. Upon graduating from the Brooklyn College of the City University of New York in 1977, he went on to pursue graduate study at Nova Southeastern University and obtained his Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1980. He completed his predoctoral internship in psychology at the West Haven VA in Connecticut, and in 1981, he joined the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) as a Clinical Fellow in the Department of Psychiatry.

Throughout his tenure at the MGH, Lee served in various research, clinical, and teaching roles within the entire Harvard system. He worked on behalf of psychologists in a multitude of ways, from serving for 6 years as Director of Biostatistics in the MGH Psychiatry Department, to working as a psychologist and clinical consultant for the MGH outpatient and inpatient services and consultant to various pharmaceutical companies, and teaching as a Lecturer in the Harvard Psychology Department. Lee was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1986 within 5 years of joining the MGH, and became intimately involved in both the Psychology Training and Steering Committees. He played an integral role in the development of

the core curriculum of the Cognitive Behavioral Scientist Track of the MGH internship in clinical psychology. He is known to dozens of cohorts of psychology interns as the leader of the Dissertation Seminar, which was a formal course designed to apply behavioral change principles to help interns complete their dissertations during internship year.

He co-founded the Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) treatment and research programs at both the MGH and McLean. His groundbreaking research on OCD symptom subtypes and his extensive empirical findings advanced behavioral and pharmacological treatments of OCD. Lee was a prolific writer, and published over 200 original peer-reviewed articles in the highest impact Psychiatry and Psychology outlets, including American Journal of Psychiatry, JAMA Psychiatry, and Biological Psychiatry. He is an internationally recognized leader in advancing the understanding and treatment of OCD. His work has been featured in major news outlets, and he has been honored for his research on OCD with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International OCD Foundation.

A deeply caring clinician, Lee was universally liked and respected by his patients. His self-help book

*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**.*

“Getting Control” was the first to describe a powerful behavioral treatment for OCD and his book “The Imp of the Mind” shed new light on the understanding and treatment of repugnant obsessions. His books have helped OCD patients and guided clinicians around the world for more than 20 years. His patients have gone out of their way to express the impact of his books by using words like “life changing,” “saved my mind from torment,” “gave me hope,” and “powerful.” Lee’s patients have described him as “kind,” “humble,” “brilliant,” and “playing a pivotal role in my recovery.”

Driven by a personal mission to expand the reach of research on OCD and its treatment, in February 2010, Lee created a Twitter account and a website called “ocdandfamilies.org”. His express purpose was to provide hope and help for patients suffering from OCD as well as their families. In particular, he was interested in disseminating information regarding taboo obsessions in OCD, which were lesser known to the general community. This platform enabled him to connect sufferers both locally and globally. He invited OCD sufferers, as well as psychology interns and fellows, to write guest blog posts on the website to normalize the experience of living with OCD and correct public misconceptions. In a related effort, Lee was the driving force in developing a website from which religiously scrupulous patients from the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions could seek information and help with their disorder. Together, these contributions highlighted his commitment to community outreach and education about OCD.

Beyond being an exceptional researcher and clinician, Lee will be remembered for having tirelessly supported and encouraged interns, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty. Lee’s mentees have been very successful with publishing their papers, and presenting their research at professional meetings. They have also been thriving with respect to obtaining their own research funding and have been promoted to leadership positions within and outside the Harvard system. As a clinical supervisor, Lee conducted supervision with a cognitive behavioral style, asking Socratic questions and leading meetings with an agenda. He had been known to sit in on therapy sessions with his supervisees, and to downplay his clinical acumen by attributing his skills to years of experience. Lee was also an expert statistician and helped numerous trainees and faculty members with complex methodological questions.

Lee was dearly loved and admired by his colleagues at MGH. They have described him as kind, loving, forgiving, compassionate, generous of his time and talent, intellectually curious, and with the highest integrity and ethics. Given his talent and fame, he never lost that rare virtue, humility. As a clinician, there was no one more compassionate, empathetic, and respectful of his patients. No matter how difficult the patient or how complex the diagnosis, he never complained or gave up on a patient. He was a visionary and innovator, always in search of more effective treatments for his patients, especially the treatment resistant. Lee had a razor sharp mind but also a warm, humble, and caring style.

On July 27, 2017, Lee died at age 62 following a long battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Carole Ann, his son David, and his daughter Emily.

Respectfully submitted,

Sabine Wilhelm, *Chairperson*

William E. Minichiello

Angela Fang