



THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE  
Harvard University

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# Charles Bernard Carpenter

Charles Bernard (“Bernie”) Carpenter, M.D., Professor Emeritus of Medicine, who led and energized the field of transplantation immunology for over 40 years, died on September 11, 2011 in Exeter, New Hampshire at the age of 78 from complications of Alzheimer’s disease.

Bernie was born in Melrose, Massachusetts on September 11, 1933. He graduated from Dartmouth College (summa cum laude) in 1955 and Dartmouth Medical School in 1956, and received his M.D. from Harvard Medical School in 1958. Bernie pursued his internal medicine training at Cornell University Medical College and the Bellevue Hospital in New York (1958-1960), and then served two years in the US Naval Medical Corps in Japan. In 1962, he returned to Boston and the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (Now Brigham and Women’s Hospital) and Harvard Medical School to train in nephrology under John P. Merrill, who only eight years before had led the first successful kidney transplant and is now credited as the father of nephrology as a specialty. Under the guidance of Merrill and surgeon Joseph Murray, Bernie played a pivotal role in developing and shaping the emerging field of allograft transplantation, eventually essentially creating the discipline of transplant medicine. As a fellow, he was the main physician providing ongoing care for the first successful cadaveric kidney recipients treated with the immunosuppressive regimen of azathioprine and glucocorticoids. It is telling that Bernie was known as much for his humanity at this time as for his skill. Bernie was held in very high regard and with real affection by the first small group of patients undergoing these innovative and experimental procedures and treatments, and he faced the uncertainty with them with compassion and reassuring calm.

Insights and questions raised by his clinical work drove Bernie to pursue research, and it was his contributions as both physician and scientist that have left an indelible influence on his colleagues, trainees and the field of medicine as a whole.

Bernie possessed an inexhaustible curiosity, a calm and caring demeanor and a dedication to the high ideals of scholarship, family and friendship. Those who worked with him on a daily basis knew him as a gentleman who always maintained an air of thoughtful equanimity even under the most trying circumstances. His office door was always open, and when it was open it meant that anyone could walk in, sit down and talk with him without an appointment. He seemed to have all the time in the world to listen, and always responded to questions in a fashion that encouraged one to make one’s own decisions and act upon them.

Bernie’s attention to detail was legendary. He would go over drafts of papers with a fine toothed comb, meticulously re-calculating results from primary data and suggesting alternative explanations for the observations which his co-investigators had not considered. This same attention to detail and ability to focus on constructive future work to be done made him the first choice to chair innumerable committees composed of individuals with often disparate agendas.

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*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**.*

Bernie had a wry sense of humor which was not often apparent because of his conservative demeanor. One could be associated with him for years before hearing him crack a joke, and often the joke would be so subtle that most people would not even appreciate that one was made.

The laboratory picnics at a lakeside park west of Boston were legendary. Everyone on the clinical service, the clinical laboratory, and the research laboratory attended these wonderful events with their extended families and friends. The laboratory softball team, the “Lymphomaniacs”, won two successive Harvard Medical Area championships, and Bernie was one of the most valued sluggers.

One of the features of the Brigham transplant program colleagues throughout the country invariably commented upon over the years was the enduring relationship between the surgeons and the nephrologists. This began with the close relationship between Joseph Murray and John Merrill and continued in this tradition with Bernie as head of Medical Transplantation. Not only was there excellent clinical rapport, but Bernie, together with his distinguished trainees Terry Strom and Edgar Milford and transplant surgeon Nicolas Tilney, were very collaborative with each other with long-time research projects and were co-investigators on many grants. The transplant surgeons always had a wonderful relationship with Bernie. Bernie fostered collegiality, and all who interacted with him learned a great deal from him.

Bernie became the mentor for a phenomenal succession of supremely talented and gifted individuals, whose own contributions firmly and irrevocably established the discipline of transplant medicine. His disciples recall the easy spirit of cooperation and collaboration, the sage and tolerant support of young investigators’ struggles with unfamiliar technology and the growing intricacies of transplantation immunology. Most of all, trainees appreciated the integrity, generosity, honesty, and intellectual rigor that Bernie brought to all endeavors. He was a passionate advocate of vigorous critical inquiry. He fostered independent thinking and incisive self-assessment in his trainees. He encouraged his trainees to explore new, and often unorthodox ideas in the laboratory. Those ideas, however, had to withstand the scrutiny of peers at the mandatory weekly laboratory meetings where those ideas and the data, which supported or refuted them, were presented and critiqued by all. His criticisms usually took the form of holding a mirror up to the one being criticized, and he restricted his criticism to scientific and academic matters. He avoided comments on his colleagues’ and trainees’ personal foibles. This set a tone in the laboratory and the clinical service of collegiality and cohesion that was quite unique. His method of reviewing ones’ own work as if from the outside resulted in a track record of success for Bernie’s trainees in grant writing, publications, and work on institutional committees and boards that was unequalled.

Bernie believed in teaching by example and by “throwing his trainees into the pool”, albeit a shallow one with lifelines. Everyone who came into the laboratory had to write an individual training grant in the year before they arrived, grants which enjoyed a success rate of about 80 percent. During the first or second year in the laboratory it would be common for him to come up to a research fellow and say “Why don’t you write this section of the RO1 or Program Project, and we will edit it together?”. These were purposeful training and confidence-building exercises that everyone who trained with Bernie experienced. Personal responsibility and independence were further promoted in that each individual in the laboratory and clinical service was encouraged to pursue a particular area of investigation that they would “own” in addition to the work that they would do on collaborative projects. If a trainee wanted to pursue work outside of the laboratory this was encouraged. Trainees were not just encouraged, but

required to attend regional and national academic meetings, and somehow he always managed to find the funds to send everyone.

Bernie's devotion to mentoring and collaboration led to an almost unparalleled record of publication and productivity. Together with his colleagues and trainees, he published over 380 scientific papers, or about one per month, over a span of 40 years. Bernie and his colleagues and trainees made major contributions to virtually every critical issue in human and experimental tissue transplantation, including the immunogenetics of transplantation and tissue typing, indirect allo-recognition, oral tolerance, mechanisms of allograft rejection, immunosuppression (chemical and biologic), complement metabolism in disease and many others.

Not surprisingly, Bernie was the recipient of many accolades and awards. He was elected to the American Society of Clinical Investigation in 1970, to the Association of American Physicians in 1981 and served as the President of the American Society of Transplant Physicians (now the American Society of Transplantation) in 1983-84. Bernie helped to found this major Society, which represented at the time the nascent field of transplantation medicine. He received the prestigious John P. Peters Award from the American Society of Nephrology in 2004 and the David Hume Award of the National Kidney Foundation in 2005. His colleagues and friends throughout the world endowed a Carpenter Transplantation Fellowship at the Brigham and Women's Hospital on the occasion of his retirement from active academic life. He officially retired in 2005 but, when faced with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, continued his contribution to the pursuit of knowledge by volunteering for a large clinical trial on the disease at the Brigham.

Bernie's professional accomplishments reveal only a small part of his life. He was a loving husband to Sandra, and father to Scott and Brad. His most enduring legacy outside of his own family will be what he gave to his patients, students, residents, fellows, and colleagues. Bernie had a quiet, methodical, and patient manner which characterized all of his interactions. It would be easy to count over a thousand people, not including his many patients, who would count Bernie as a strong positive influence on their lives. Beyond Charles Bernard Carpenter's important contributions to the earliest days of clinical and investigative immunogenetics, his teaching and mentoring style have informed a new generation of academics and clinicians who are emulating his example in their own careers.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Bonventre, MD, PhD

Richard J. Glassock, MD

Edgar Milford, MD

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Terry Strom, MD

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(\* Some parts of this tribute have appeared in the Journal of the American Society of Nephrology in 2012 (JASN Volume 23)