



Walter C. Guralnick



Dr. Walter C. Guralnick, a major figure in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, an educational innovator, master surgeon, mentor, colleague and friend died, surrounded by family, on September 6, 2017 at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), the institution he loved and served for 65 years. Even at 100 years of age, as Professor Emeritus of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery at Harvard, he remained an active teacher of residents; a sensitive and thoughtful mentor for students, department heads and deans; and a caring and active participant in health care policy debates. At his 75th Harvard School of Dental Medicine (HSDM) reunion and 100th birthday celebration in 2016, he noted that he was also accepted to Harvard Law School but wrote to the Dean requesting a deferment because he had decided to attend Harvard Dental School. When asked by someone in the audience what he was going to do with his next 100 years, Dr. Guralnick replied that he was going to activate his Harvard Law School acceptance and get a law degree.

Dr. Guralnick was born in East Boston on November 1, 1916 in a home dedicated to issues of social justice and the principled delivery of universal health care. (His father, Rubin, was an elector for Socialist

Party presidential nominee Norman Thomas and a physician for the Workmen's Circle.) Walter attended Boston Latin School, where he met his future father-in-law, Philip Marson (one of his teachers), and through him his future wife, Betty. Upon graduation from Massachusetts State College (now University of Massachusetts), where he extended his life-long appreciation of journalism and literature as managing editor of the college newspaper, he went on to Harvard Dental School, which he graduated in 1941.

Dr. Guralnick was an oral surgery resident at Boston City Hospital when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Before shipping out for Europe, he married Betty Marson in the Brookline house where she had lived since she was 12, and where they would continue to live throughout their sixty-eight-year marriage. Dr. Guralnick spent four years in the military during World War II, serving in the 7th General Hospital in England. He returned to Boston in 1946 and started his own oral and maxillofacial surgery practice. He joined the

surgical staff at MGH in 1951 and the HSDM faculty in 1954.

A first-class clinical scholar, Dr. Guralnick was a principal investigator on NIH research and training grants, was awarded a Kellogg Foundation grant in 1996 to study delivery of health care and authored numerous papers, book chapters, and books on a variety of subjects. Although a busy clinical surgeon, he always remained available and eager to help students, residents and junior faculty. He was a valued teacher and encouraged every individual to reach his or her full potential. In recognition of his work advising and mentoring students, staff and faculty, he received the A. Clifford Barger Excellence in Mentoring Award from Harvard Medical School (HMS) in 2000. Dr. Guralnick served on the admissions committees of both HSDM and HMS and chaired the Committee on Promotions and Examinations at HSDM for 21 years.

The highlights of his academic career were his appointments as Clinical Professor and Chairman of the Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery at Harvard and MGH in 1967 and Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery in 1974. He served as Department Chair from 1967-1982 and in 1987 was appointed Professor Emeritus of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. He was the first dentist to be awarded the Harvard Medal by President Lawrence Summers in 2005. The citation reads, in part: ‘Walter C. Guralnick, D.M.D. ’41, emeritus professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery, has had an enormous influence on graduates of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine and the Harvard Medical School..... Through his demonstrated commitment to excellence, diversity and the ideals and goals of Harvard, the scope and place of dentistry in the teaching hospitals has dramatically changed. Funds established at both MGH and HSDM will have his name and legacy remembered for generations to come. The Harvard and MGH community won’t be the same without him.’

At the MGH, Dr. Guralnick brought full recognition to Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS) as a surgical specialty by building a high volume and high quality clinical service and a well-respected residency program. He is the only dentist to have chaired the General Executive Committee of the MGH. As the first Chairman of the Committee on Residency Education and Training of the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS), he was instrumental in planning and implementing the in-service residency training examination. He has also been a leader in attracting women and minorities into the profession. After 15-years as OMFS Chief, he stepped down and was appointed Director of the Operating Rooms and subsequently Director of the MGH Ambulatory Care Center. When asked what he considered his most important achievements, Dr. Guralnick replied modestly, first, changing the education of oral and maxillofacial surgeons for the better and second, helping to educate and train a cadre of superb leaders for our profession and specialty.

Dr. Guralnick was a pioneer in the effort to expand the breadth of American OMFS training and to integrate its dental and medical components. The introduction of the Harvard Plan in 1971 remains a crowning achievement. The plan was based on the philosophy that general surgery should be an integral part of an oral surgeon’s training. He emphasized that the ideal educational background should include the M.D. and D.M.D. degrees plus oral and maxillofacial and general surgery clinical training. Controversial then, but nevertheless influential, the concept which began with the MGH/Harvard MD Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Program now numbers more than 44 of the 100 training programs and more than half of the OMFS residents in the United States. The ranks of “dual degree” members of the specialty have grown to about 10% of the total, as the scope of clinical practice has increased, benefiting patients and all members of the specialty. Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons are now granted fellowship in the American College of Surgeons and, this year, the College approved the formation of an OMFS

Advisory Committee to stand alongside those of the other surgical specialties.

Dr Guralnick's influence went far beyond the confines of Boston and Harvard. Starting in 1979, he was instrumental in establishing what became significant and lasting relationships with Oral & Maxillofacial/Stomatology colleagues in The People's Republic of China. In 1980, he brought a multi-disciplinary dental/medical/surgical group to China at the request of the Chinese Ministry of Health. Lectures and seminars were given in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Nanjing, establishing strong relationships with the leaders in these key medical universities. This expanded in 1983 when a collaboration with Project Hope was established. Dr Guralnick facilitated the exchange of Chinese doctors to the United States for expanded study. Ongoing educational programs in multiple areas were established including OMFS, orthodontics, public health, hospital administration, and updated research techniques. In addition, his leadership helped initiate the establishment of the first modern recovery rooms, comprehensive cleft/craniofacial teams and state of the art radiation therapy programs for head and neck cancer. "Wally" and Betty Guralnick also became 'family' for numerous Chinese doctors visiting Boston. These programs and personal relationships left an educational legacy and genuine friendship between Chinese and American colleagues.

In England, during World War II, he met Mr. Norman Rowe, a renowned British oral surgeon. Years later, with Rowe, Professor Geoffrey Howe and Professor Malcolm Harris, he developed an exchange program between the MGH, Royal Dental/ St. George's Hospitals, Roehampton, Kings College and the Eastman Dental Hospitals in England. Ten Boston trainees spent substantial time at British surgical centers and twelve United Kingdom maxillofacial trainees and a senior lecturer were invited to the MGH and HSDM. All had their careers enhanced by this invaluable transatlantic rotation.

Dr Guralnick never forgot his dental background. As Massachusetts Dental Society, President (1968), he was instrumental in seeking legislative approval to establish the state's first public dental insurance program, the Massachusetts Dental Service Corporation (Board member 1966-82, President 1970-1980) which is now part of Delta Dental. He was a member of the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Dentistry from 1984-1994 serving as Chairman in 1987. Dr. Guralnick has been President of the Massachusetts Society of Oral Surgeons, the Massachusetts Dental Society, and the New England Society of Oral Surgeons, in addition to founding the New England Foundation for Continuing Dental Education.

Dr. Guralnick's achievements have been recognized by numerous awards, including the previously mentioned Harvard Medal in 2005. He was a Senior Member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. He holds honorary degrees from Xian Medical and West China Universities and was recognized by the Royal College of Surgeons of England with the award of an honorary fellowship for his contribution to international surgical training. In 2014, the 96th Annual Meeting of the AAOMS was dedicated to Dr. Guralnick for his life-long contributions to the specialty. The Walter C. Guralnick Professorship in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery was established in 1993 at Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital. He received the Donald B. Osbon Award as Outstanding Educator (1992), the William J. Gies Foundation Award for Distinguished Achievement (1987) and Committeeman of the Year Award (1978) all from the AAOMS. Dr. Guralnick was also honored with the Distinguished Faculty Award from HSDM in 1975.

Dr. Guralnick has had an enormous influence as a result of his mentoring activities during a 65-year career. His students are disproportionately represented in the ranks of senior and influential academic

surgeons and leaders: More than 14 have become professors and department chairs/OMFS service chiefs, 4 have been Deans of Dental Schools, 2 have been editors-in-chief, 1 associate editor and at least 7 have been on the editorial board of the Journal of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery and 2 have been Presidents of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery.

Dr. Guralnick was predeceased by his wife Betty who died in 2010 at the age of 89. He is survived by his three children, Peter, Susan and Tom; five grandchildren and numerous great-grandchildren.

Respectfully submitted,

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