



# Norman L. Letvin



Norm Letvin, Professor of Medicine and Chief of the Division of Viral Pathogenesis in the Department of Medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, passed away on May 28, 2012, after a courageous struggle against pancreatic cancer for nearly five years. He bore this heavy burden with grace and determination and was at the peak of an extraordinary career, which he maintained up to the very last few days of his life.

Norm was a world leader in research to develop a vaccine against HIV/AIDS. After graduation from Harvard College summa cum laude in 1971, Harvard Medical School in 1975, and training in internal medicine, he began his work in immunology in the laboratory of Nobel Laureate Baruj Benacerraf in 1978. From 1982 to 1994, he was the founding chair of the Division of Immunology at the New England Primate Research Center. There he made one of the seminal discoveries in the field of AIDS pathogenesis; namely, Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV) and the AIDS-like disease that it causes in rhesus macaques. Using this as an experimental model, Norm made major contributions to our understanding of the role of cellular immunology

in SIV/HIV infection, and to the design of candidate vaccines against this infection.

In 1994, Norm came to the Department of Medicine at Beth Israel Hospital as Chief of the Division of Viral Pathogenesis. Over the years, Norm stated that he considered taking this position to be one of the very best decisions that he ever made. He built the Division into a center of enormous research strength and international prominence in HIV research. He led major collaborative research initiatives supported by the NIH and by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He was a member of virtually every major HIV research advisory committee throughout the world.

There was an additional hallmark to Norm's activities in his division. He was totally devoted to teaching and mentoring of undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty. It was

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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**.*

something that he enjoyed immensely and at which he excelled. He received the William Silen Lifetime Achievement in Mentoring Award from Harvard Medical School in 2009, as recognition for his contributions as an outstanding mentor. Characteristically for him, he was determined not to let his illness interfere with the mentoring to which he was so devoted. Today, his mentees are occupying important academic positions at Harvard and other major academic institutions.

Any discussion of Norm's achievements must include his talent and accomplishments as a musician. He was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, where as a five year old, he taught himself to play the recorder, and became proficient at the clarinet. His family nurtured his musical talent, and he was offered scholarships at both the Julliard School and Curtiss Institute of Music. He decided instead to attend Harvard College and Harvard Medical School, but maintained extraordinary activity as a world-class clarinetist who gave concerts with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and with chamber music groups both locally and nationally. He was invited to give concerts at scientific conferences at which he spoke, and these were memorable occasions for attendees.

Norm was a most devoted family man. The love and companionship of his family was an enormous source of joy and pride to him. He is survived by his wife, Marion Stein Letvin, who is a neurologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and his four children, Andrea Ricka, Rebecca, Adam and Elizabeth. A symposium in Norm Letvin's honor was held on March 19, 2013 at Harvard Medical School. It included presentations by leaders in the field of AIDS vaccine research from throughout the world, and was a testimony to Norm Letvin's legacy as a scientist, as an educator, and as a beloved friend.

Respectfully submitted,

Raphael Dolin, Chairperson

Dan Barouch

Stephen Harrison