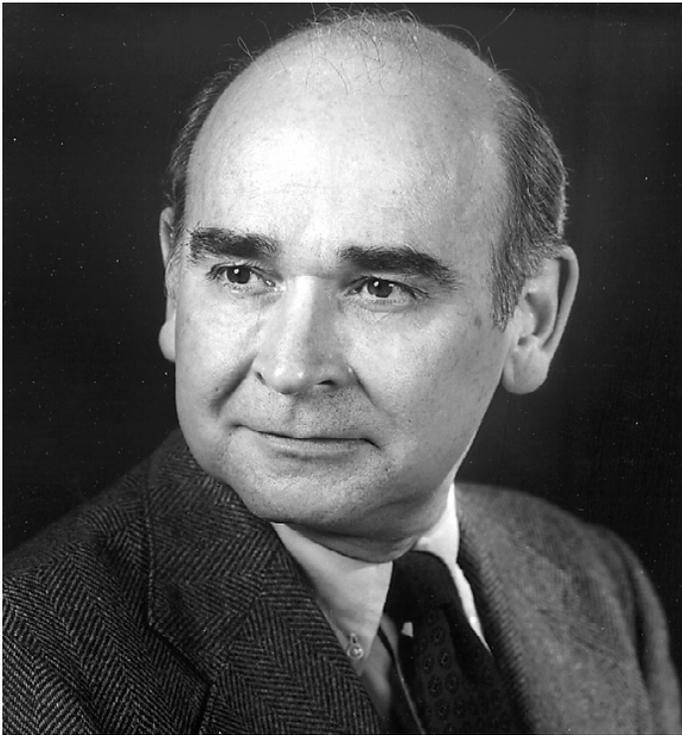




Donald Norman Medearis, Jr.



Donald N. Medearis, Jr., Charles Wilder Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics and formerly Chief of the Children's Service at Massachusetts General Hospital, died suddenly on his way to work Monday morning, September 29th, 1997. The throng that filled Trinity Church on the following Saturday gave testimony to the respect and affection in which he was held. This was his family, his kin by blood and those who had come to regard him as kin - "Uncle Don" - those he had shepherded through residency training during his 18 years as Chief at the MGH, those from his earlier posts at the Hopkins, at Pittsburgh and Cleveland, his office staff who revered him as well as his professional associates and friends.

Don was born August 27, 1927 in Kansas City, Kansas, grandson of a physician and son of that city's first pediatrician. He took his father's name, his principles and love of children into a distinguished career in academic medicine. Just out of high school in 1945, he served briefly as a navy corpsman, and participated for many years in a Naval Reserve research unit, which he eventually commanded. When the war ended, he went on to the University of Kansas where he earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry in 1950. Not as well known as his scholarship is that he was an excellent competitive tennis player, and, as a member of the swimming team at the University of Kansas he set a record in the backstroke. In more recent years, he was happiest when kayaking on the Maine coast with his wife, Molly.

Don went east to medical school at Harvard where he received the M.D. degree in 1953. Although already committed to pediatrics, he chose first to take an internship in medicine at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis in order to broaden his understanding of patients and their families as they grew older. His interest in an integrated training in medicine and pediatrics had begun to develop even then. Subsequently, he spent two years in residency training at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati. In his spare time, he worked in the

laboratory of Dr. Albert Sabin who was then developing the oral polio vaccine. This was also when Don wooed and married his beloved Molly-Mary Ellen Marble-his staunch supporter and mother of the four children of whom he was so proud.

Don always said that the high point in his training was his fellowship in infectious diseases with John Enders at the Boston Children's Hospital. "The Chief," as Don and his other fellows affectionately referred to this gentle, unassuming man, taught him to leave no stones unturned or possibilities overlooked. Don carried this approach to patient care, into his own research, his critique of the work of others and especially his teaching. He always sought the evidence, not some else's interpretation. Is there anyone privileged to have attended morning report with him who has forgotten his demand, "show me the data!" During those fellowship years with John Enders Don met many of his enduring friends and associates: Sam Katz, Sarge Cheever, Fred Robbins, Tom Weller, Monto Ho and Sid Kibrick. There, Don developed a life-long interest in virology, particularly the cytomegalovirus. It was there too that he investigated methods for killing the polio virus and participated in development of the forthcoming measles vaccine. At the end of his fellowship, Don's first appointment was at the Hopkins in 1958 as Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Microbiology. He was later selected as a Joseph P. Kennedy Scholar in Research on the maternal transmission of infectious disease, particularly cytomegalovirus, which might cause mental retardation in the newborn. His laboratory was an old laundry room in the basement of the Harriet Lane Hospital, which he soon transformed into a thriving, productive unit.

Don's success in teaching and research was rewarded by a promotion to Associate Professor in 1963 and in his being chosen, two years later, to become Medical Director of the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University. His extraordinary ability, particularly in dealing with people, led to his being drafted to the role of Dean, a position he took with some reluctance and with the proviso that he would do the job for five years only. As with every job Don tackled, this was done with excellence. During this time in Pittsburgh he supported the pioneering work of Dr. Peter Safar in intensive care units and emergency medical services, and established the first PICU at the hospital there. In addition, he endorsed and participated in the efforts of Dr. Kenneth Rogers to establish a neighborhood clinic on "the hill" above the medical school, and spearheaded a program to recruit minority students into medicine.

But he was true to his word, and in 1974 he resigned as Dean at Pittsburgh to become the Director of the Department of Pediatrics at Cleveland Metropolitan Hospital and Co-chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Case Western University.

Don was not permitted a long stay in Cleveland. The search committee looking for a successor to Nathan Talbot at the Massachusetts General Hospital singled him out as the outstanding candidate and, in 1977, he moved his family back to Boston and embarked on 20 years service to MGH, the Harvard Medical School, and to the nation. At each site he worked tirelessly to improve health care access,

to improve the role of women in medicine, and to act as an advocate for children. At MGH he greatly strengthened the existing PICU. He built the pediatric service not only in size, but in excellence and national recognition. He also built it as a component of the general hospital, fostering the development of the integrated medicine-pediatrics training program. From the time of his fellowship when he learned to cultivate the cytomegalovirus, he always found time for his lab where he helped elucidate the role of the virus in transplantation medicine, and in his last decade, the misery it would cause in the AIDS pandemic.

Don's lifelong interest in the ethical problems in medicine was engaged when he was chosen by President Carter to serve on the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research. Here, such issues as defining death were considered. This hitherto simple exit had suddenly become complicated by the availability of "life support" systems. Don's earlier advocacy of emergency services led him to the chairmanship of the Institute of Medicine's Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medical Services. The committee's recommendations were included in a treatise on that subject.

At the time of his death, Don was immersed in a project reflecting his interests in children, health and history. Early in his tenure as Chief of the Children's Service, he had fostered the gathering of information about children as patients in the hospital from its opening in 1823. He noted that there were no special facilities for their care; they were valued for the amusement they provided the older patients. This became the subject of Hughes Evan's doctoral thesis.

It came to light during Evan's work that ever since the hospital formally opened a pediatric unit in 1909, and continuing through the 1940's, ledgers were kept of the name, place of residence, the dates and diagnoses both at entry and discharge of every child. Don saved these ledgers from destruction and surrounded himself with them in 1995 after he stepped down as Chief of Service. He was putting together a history from a pediatrician's perspective of health, social change, and medical progress during the century, which had seen greater change than any before. He was reminded of this daily as he walked through the front entrance and passed the horse drawn ambulance, the patients' conveyances when the Children's Service opened in 1909. Reaching his desk, he looked out on the Medflight helicopters, the high-speed, life-saving conveyances of the 1990's.

Don's greatest contribution lay in teaching and leadership. He led not by order but by persuasion and perception. He taught by example, encouragement, his own excellence and an incredible memory for the facts. His encyclopedic knowledge was legend. Not only was Trinity Church thronged for his memorial service but letters of remembrance poured in to his wife and family. A few examples epitomize the man:

"Children everywhere have lost a strong voice and an advocate for their care."

"His goodness shone from his very being, he left the world a better place."

“I was one of the many little people he took time to speak to.”

“Everytime I enter an examining room I take a little of him with me.”

“He not only asked about my family and my husband, but wanted to make sure that my career and family were balanced.”

“Firm but never autocratic.”

“What he said was what he meant!”

“Good doctors are not hard to find but exceptional human beings are so very rare.”

Respectfully submitted,

R. Alan Ezkowitz, *Chairperson*

John D. Crawford

Michael S. Jellinek

Ronald E. Kleinman