



THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE  
Harvard University

# Robert C. Moellering, Jr.



*Photograph courtesy of the BIDMC Office of Communications*

On February 24, 2014, Robert C. Moellering, Jr., the Shields Warren- Mallinkrodt Professor of Medical Research and the 1999-2005 Herrman L. Blumgart Professor of Medicine, died after a prolonged illness. Bob, as he was affectionately known, was an internationally respected leader among members of the infectious disease and microbiology communities and a leader in internal medicine at Harvard Medical School (HMS). He was survived by his beloved wife, Mary Jane Ferraro, Ph.D. (Director, Microbiology

Laboratory, Massachusetts General Hospital and HMS Professor of Pathology and Medicine, who subsequently died on January 18, 2020) and three now adult children from a prior marriage, Anne E., Robert C., and Catherine I.

Bob was the eldest of the four children of Robert Charles and Irene (Nolde) Moellering. Born in 1936 in Lafayette, IN, Bob was educated through college in Indiana. As an outstanding high school student and athlete (tennis and baseball), he developed a love of learning and athletics and from his parents an enduring love of music, particularly opera from his mother. There too he found a lifelong interest in science that allowed him to transition away from a career in the ministry toward which his father had been guiding him. After graduating with highest distinction from Valparaiso University, Bob matriculated at HMS (Class of 1962) where, with the exception of 2 years in the United States Public Health Service Honolulu Heart Program, he spent his entire career. He received his M.D. degree *cum laude* and then trained in internal medicine and as a Clinical and Research Fellow in Infectious Diseases at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). Bob's clinical skills and excellent judgment were quickly recognized as was his potential as both a leader and productive investigator. Accordingly, in 1970 he was appointed to the staff of the MGH and as an Instructor in Medicine at HMS. These judgments about his potential proved prescient and by 1980 he was promoted to Professor of Medicine (HMS).

*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**.*

In 1981 Bob was named Physician-in-Chief and Chair of the Department of Medicine at the New England

Deaconess Hospital (NEDH) and the Shields Warren-Mallinkrodt Professor of Medicine at HMS. With the move of Lahey Clinic from the NEDH to its Burlington, MA facility, the Deaconess Department of Medicine was composed of approximately 25 full-time faculty clustered in cardiology, hematology/oncology, rheumatology and pulmonology. Bob was charged by the Hospital Board of Directors and Dean Daniel Tosteson to develop a complete multispecialty Department that would function independently in parallel with the then three other Departments of Medicine at HMS. In this effort Bob was intent on establishing not only a culture of clinical and scientific excellence but also of collegiality. Leveraging his clinical, research, and teaching abilities plus his leadership and character, he recruited both from within HMS and more widely to build such a Department. As academic productivity in the spheres of clinical care, research and teaching blossomed, the Deaconess's Department of Medicine was recognized by HMS as fully independent. By 1996 Bob had recruited nationally and internationally some 125 full-time Department faculty who shared a commitment to the values of its Chair - academic excellence and collegiality.

In 1996, in the wake of the merger of the Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Massachusetts General Hospital two years earlier, hospital leadership at Beth Israel Hospital and NEDH decided to merge the two institutions to form the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC). This organizational change necessitated combining two faculties and two cultures, as well as decisions about leadership of each department and division. Dr. Robert Glickman (then Chair at Beth Israel) was appointed Chair of the newly combined Department of Medicine, and Bob was appointed Vice Chair as well as President of Harvard Medical Faculty Physicians, the physician's practice plan. The merger was tumultuous for some departments, especially Anesthesia and Surgery; however, it was not so for the Department of Medicine. This was in large measure due to Bob's selfless commitment to making the relationship work, the role model he set for faculty in his Deaconess department, and his strong interpersonal and leadership skills.

In 1998, Bob was appointed Chair of the Department of Medicine and Physician-in-Chief at BIDMC and in 1999 the Herrman L. Blumgart Professor of Medicine at HMS. As a result of Bob's wisdom, leadership, judgment and integrity and his acceptance of each faculty member from either campus for his or her unique contributions to the Department, he readily earned the respect of all faculty, independent of their previous hospital affiliation. His Division Chiefs remained committed to him and the Department's missions - excellence in clinical care, teaching, and research. Under his administration the Department was sustained, grew, and served as an anchor and stabilizing force for the overall institution.

During his tenure as Chair from 1998-2005, Bob was a beloved leader; he was universally admired as a superb clinician, a truly outstanding teacher, as well as for his personal warmth. Bob was committed to his faculty, many of whom were advanced for Harvard Medical School promotions based on their

scholarly accomplishments. Furthermore, he had an unwavering commitment to the residency training program and to the growth and professional development of each and every resident. A highly visible presence to the residents as both a teacher and a role model through his constant and consistent contributions to many components of the teaching program, Bob was held in awe by the housestaff for not only his personal characteristics but also his encyclopedic knowledge of internal medicine and all its subspecialties, not just his field of particular expertise, infectious disease.

Beyond the view of many of his Department and trainees, Bob was an internationally recognized leader in infectious diseases and a researcher with legendary knowledge of antibiotics, their mechanisms of action, vulnerability to resistance, and unique therapeutic utility. His most prolific research contributions involved studies of antibiotic combinations and mechanisms of synergism in enterococci. He identified critical differences in response to such antibiotic exposures between *Enterococcus faecalis* and *Enterococcus faecium*. He defined the role of enterococcal aminoglycoside-modifying enzymes in negating the synergism between cell wall-active agents and the aminoglycosides in achieving a bactericidal effect. This work resulted in the strategy which clinical microbiology laboratories use to define effective synergistic therapy for *E. faecalis* endocarditis, a therapeutic approach that remains relevant today.

He was an authority on antimicrobial susceptibility testing and served for 12 years on the National Committee for Clinical Laboratory Standards (NCCLS, now the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute, CLSI) subcommittees for Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing and Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy as well as serving on the Advisory Panel on Antimicrobial Resistance for the Office of Technology, U. S. Congress. Bob was commonly called upon to investigate the activity of numerous new antimicrobials against human pathogens and to provide critical appraisals of new antibiotics as they were introduced into clinical use.

As novel mechanisms of resistance were encountered, he directed experimental work in treatment models of infections with enterococci, staphylococci and Gram-negative bacteria. He directed molecular and susceptibility studies of vancomycin-resistant enterococci, vancomycin-intermediate *S. aureus*, and of *S. aureus* resistant to linezolid or non-susceptible to daptomycin and was one of the first to recognize extended spectrum beta-lactamase, a now common mechanism of resistance in Gram-negative bacteria. Later work in his laboratory extended to investigations about the pathogenesis of *S. aureus* infections.

Bob shared knowledge gained from this research and from his clinical work to educate the medical community. He produced numerous book chapters and reviews on antimicrobial therapy and provided guidance on treatment of increasingly resistant pathogens. He served for 10 years as Editor-in-Chief of *Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy*, a major journal of the American Society for Microbiology, and for 28 years as Editor-in-Chief of the *Infectious Diseases Clinics of North America*. He was an Editor of the *European Journal of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases* as well as the *Sanford Guide to Antimicrobial Therapy* and the *Sanford Guide to HIV/AIDS Therapy*.

Among his too numerous to list honors and awards, Bob's international stature as an authority on antimicrobial chemotherapy was recognized with the Garrod Medal of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy. He received two prestigious awards from the Infectious Diseases Society of America, of which he was the 1990-91 President: the Maxwell Finland Award for outstanding contributions to the understanding of infectious diseases and public health and the Alexander Fleming Award for Lifetime Achievement in infectious diseases. He also received the Maxwell Finland Award for scientific achievement from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

Throughout his remarkable career and in spite of numerous awards and accolades, Bob maintained his unique character – humility, integrity, a sincere concern for others, and generosity. To those around him, his “touch” was notable as was his ability to enhance their sense of self-worth. Throughout his career, he maintained a genuine interest in the well-being and success of his trainees and colleagues. In his own words in 2005 at the time of his retirement as Chair of the BIDMC Department of Medicine, Bob offered thanks to his colleagues and trainees: “The ability to work with you as a teacher, as a mentor, has provided my greatest professional satisfaction. You are my legacy. Your success is my success and will be forever.” Although gone from our presence, he will never be forgotten by those he touched nor the institutions he graced. All who knew him, his Departments of Medicine and the BIDMC, as well as countless patients and institutions are better today because of his guidance and his sharing of himself and his wisdom with colleagues, trainees, and the infectious disease and medical communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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