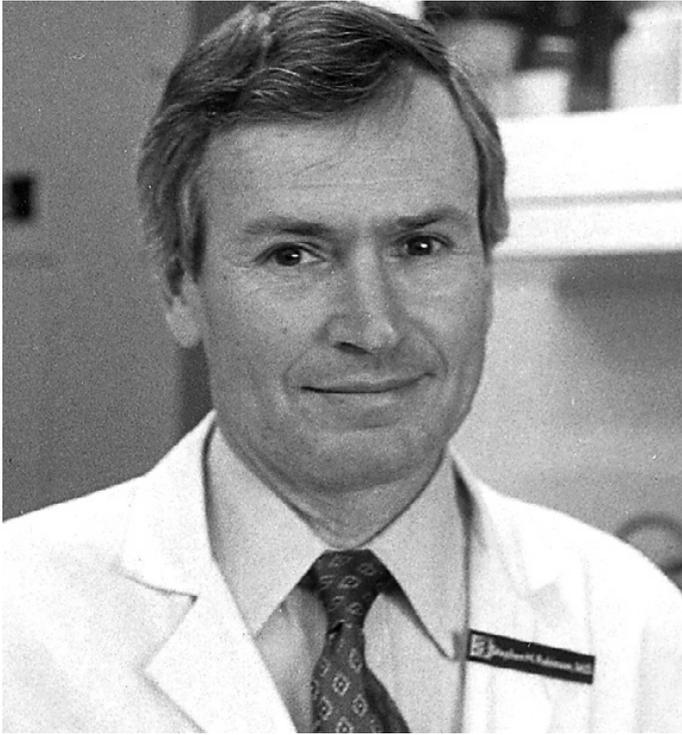




THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE
Harvard University

Stephen Howard Robinson



A superb physician and extraordinary medical educator has left us. Stephen H. Robinson, George C. Reisman Professor of Medicine at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, died on May 27, 1998, at the age of 65 with his beloved wife and children at his side. A memorial service held one month later at Harvard Medical School attested to his legacy of personal and professional accomplishment as husband and father, physician and teacher, venerated colleague and cherished friend.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Steve Robinson prepared at Erasmus Hall High School for Harvard College, where a classmate remembered him as “a brilliant and gifted intellect, comfortable in the humanities as well as the

sciences.” After graduating *summa cum laude*, Steve entered the Harvard Medical School, and did his internship and residency in Internal Medicine at the Boston City Hospital, Harvard Medical Service. At the Thorndike Memorial Laboratories, Steve encountered many of the mentors who were to shape his professional life. William Castle, M.D., then Chief of Medicine on the Harvard Service, carried on the legacy of George Minot, and trained many of those who became the nation’s leaders in investigative hematology. Dr. Castle recognized in Steve a sterling prospect for success as an academic physician.

Steve’s research interests took him to the National Institutes of Health, where he worked with Rudi Schmid on heme degradation and became an expert in the porphyrias, a complex and mysterious series of illnesses. Few lectures at Harvard Medical School were later given on this subject without Steve at the podium, imparting his mastery of the intricacies of these diseases. In 1965 he returned to Boston’s Beth Israel Hospital at the invitation of Howard Hiatt, the newly appointed Physician-in-Chief. Dr. Hiatt was assembling an array of “young Turks” who would shape the next generation of American physicians. The Beth Israel became Steve’s professional home and was for thirty years the arena for his professional

*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**.*

activities as Chief of Hematology and Associate Chairman of Medicine under Drs. Eugene Braunwald and Robert Glickman.

During these years, Steve continued research on heme metabolism and made seminal contributions in this and other hematologic areas of great importance, such as sickle cell anemia, and hematopoietic stem cell maturation. The work in his laboratory attracted numerous medical and graduate students, who appreciated his dedication, meticulous skills, and reasoned and thoughtful analyses. Not only a respected scholar, Steve was also a doctor's doctor. A speaker at his memorial service recalled, "I could see as a student that his patients loved and revered him--not only because of his gentle and reassuring manner but also because he seemed able to keep them all alive indefinitely whatever the diagnosis." Another colleague "felt secure in trusting my mother to his care during her complicated illness. I shall always remain indebted to him for the intelligence and sensitivity he brought to her management."

Steve was an extraordinary teacher. He was patient with students and fellows, always listened carefully, and rendered constructive criticism in a manner that was supportive and encouraging. His exacting standards were consistently transmitted with kindness, consistency and modesty. In fact, genuine modesty was one of the secrets to his success. More talented than most, and intensely committed to excellence in all pursuits, he raised others to his level.

Steve's extraordinary skill as a classical hematologist naturally made him a highly sought-after lecturer and tutor in the HMS Pathophysiology course. This became one of several platforms from which he influenced the lives of many future physicians. One student, later a colleague and friend, recalled that Steve was the "first faculty member at HMS that I wanted to be like." Invoking Webster's definition of "elegance"--"refined grace, precision, neatness and simplicity"--he recalled Steve as an "elegant man, in the way he looked, spoke, wrote, thought and acted." The Medical School recognized Steve's unusual talents as pedagogue by appointing him first Master of the William Castle Society, a title whose associations were particularly meaningful for Steve. He enjoyed interacting with a large number of talented students, and they, in turn, reciprocated his affection and appreciated his guidance.

At the Beth Israel Hospital, Steve's gift as a teacher led to his appointment as Firm Chief, responsible for the medical education of a substantial segment of the medical house staff. He retained this position until illness forced him to step aside. Poignantly, a number of the medical house officers he shepherded had occasion to care for him during his illness and did so with tenderness and solicitude that is reserved for a venerated teacher.

The esteem in which Steve's patients held him is conveyed by the words of one of them, "Busy as he was, he always made me feel as if he had all the time in the world. We *don't* have all the time in the world, and should cherish every minute--as he did. I'll treasure my memories of him and be grateful I had such a great doctor and such a good friend. There is no way to give an adequate thank you for 30 years of medical expertise and friendship. But I'll remember him, with gratitude, *forever*."

Those who knew Steve's gentle demeanor and seriousness and mature judgment also knew that he was a vigorous and even a daring athlete: an adventurous and graceful skier, and an intense and steadfast tennis player. No less important were his love of good books, and his pleasure in fine wines and food.

Steve's family lay at the core of his existence. Carole, his beloved wife, was his best friend, intellectual counterpart, and constant companion. His three splendid children, Lisa, Susan, and Michael, and three grandchildren, Peter, Juliet, and Lillie, were a source of joy and pride to him, and they fully returned his deep love.

Steve Robinson's stature was inseparable from his modesty. His effectiveness was inseparable from his genuine humility. He was an honest, ethical and --in the light of his many talents--unpretentious man. He took life seriously, worried about those close to him and about the wider world. At his memorial service, Dr. Ned Cassem, in deference to Steve's splendidly serious side, brought forth Shakespeare's words as a fitting farewell:

*When he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.*

Stephen H. Robinson was a great and good man. He inspired much love, did much good, and left the world a better place.

Respectfully submitted,

Lowell E. Schnipper, *Chairperson*

Franklin Bunn

Justine Carr

Steven E. Come

Reed Drews

Steven Weinberger