



Michael W. Shannon



Michael Shannon, Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, died on March 10, 2009 at the far too young age of 55 years. His death came suddenly and unexpectedly after getting off a plane in New York City following a vacation in South America. With that tragedy medicine lost an exceptional toxicologist, pediatrician and friend to many. He exemplified the complete physician with remarkable skills in clinical research, teaching and leadership coupled with an immense capacity and profound love of being a doctor. He was a consummate clinician, a prominent academician, and an effective children's advocate nationally as well as internationally. His influence in clinical toxicology, pediatric emergency medicine and pediatric environmental health had spread through the country and beyond. He was a focused investigator, a prolific scholar, a leader of innumerable local and national organizations, a mentor and a marvelous friend. No one was certain where he found the energy to accomplish so much in such a short time. He coupled his professional work with great talent as a dancer, captivating audiences in such Boston performances as "Black

Nativity" and the annual "Urban Nutcracker." It is no surprise that his vacation in South America was spent learning more about dance and particularly the Tango. He brought the arts to medicine and was known as the "Dancing Doctor." He was also a devoted family man often flying home from national meetings to have dinner with his wife, Elaine and his two children, Evan and Dalila, then returning the next day to his meeting.

Michael always wanted to be a physician. He received his BA from Washington University in St. Louis and his MD from Duke Medical School. He trained in pediatrics at Boston City Hospital and Children's Hospital Boston and received his fellowship training in general pediatrics, clinical pharmacology and

toxicology and pediatric emergency medicine at Children's Hospital Boston. He rose rapidly through the academic ranks becoming the first African American, full professor of pediatrics in Harvard Medical School's history. He attained board certification in four disciplines, Pediatrics, Emergency Medicine, Pediatric Emergency Medicine, and Medical Toxicology. He served as both Director of the Emergency Medicine Pediatric Fellowship Program and Associate Chief of the Division of Emergency Medicine at Children's Hospital before assuming leadership of the Division from 2003 to 2007. His leadership roles in toxicology included Director of the Lead and Toxicology Program from 1994 to 1998, Director of the Pediatric Environmental Health Center from 1998 to 2002, and in 2007 Founder and Director of the Program in Clinical Pharmacology.

Michael's national leadership contributions were immeasurable. A member of the Society of Pediatric Research and the American Pediatric Society, he served as President of the American College of Medical Toxicology and as President of the Association of Pediatric Emergency Medicine Fellowship Directors. He also served as Chair of the Sub-Board in Pediatric Emergency Medicine of the American Board of Pediatrics and Chair of the Committee on Environmental Health of the American Academy of Pediatrics. His work in toxicology as a consultant to governmental agencies included remarkable contributions to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Michael's research and scholarship resulted in over 300 scholarly publications and authorship of six books including senior editorship of his own text, *Clinical Management of Poisoning and Drug Overdose*. His research advanced our understanding of drug overdose, the hazards of drugs, the spectrum of drugs of abuse and toxic exposures in children, and pediatric aspects of bioterrorism. His research and multiple publications on theophylline elucidated the clinical, pharmacologic and biochemical manifestations of acute, acute on chronic, and chronic overdose with subsequent implications for therapy. With tricyclic antidepressant overdose, he enlarged our knowledge of its clinical manifestations and furthered our understanding of the use of EKG changes in its diagnosis. His studies of low level lead exposure in children and its effect on cognitive development led to an augmented understanding of the role of chelation therapy and specifically the therapeutic value of d-penicillamine. His studies of cocaine exposure in young children living with drug abusing parents, lead exposure in autistic children with pica behaviors, and the role of the internet in the adolescent drug culture established his reputation as a pediatric champion and advocate for public health and prevention. A student of the history of toxicology and a member of the Toxicological History Society, his lucid presentations on toxicological disasters and poisons were compelling.

He directed the largest pediatric emergency medicine fellowship program in the country and trained innumerable subsequent national leaders in toxicology and emergency medicine. He was invited to lecture at countless national conferences, mesmerizing audiences with his vast knowledge and the logic and clarity of his presentation. As noted by his chief, Gary Fleisher, "he didn't just lecture, he performed." His skills as a communicator led to multiple invitations from the media, and the opportunity to educate both a local and national lay audience.

Michael loved caring for his patients whether in the emergency room, the out-patient clinic, the inpatient setting or the intensive care unit and, in turn, they loved, admired and respected him. He was always there for them engendering confidence, assurance and hope. He took his emergency room shifts serving as a remarkable role model for his younger colleagues. He derived immense joy and satisfaction from his service as a physician to his patients and their families.

Prior to his death Michael moved into the area of clinical pharmacology and pediatric environmental health and was successfully acquiring competitive NRSA and NIH funding as he attacked this newest academic challenge. Many felt his greatest contributions to medicine were yet to come. Still too young to receive the many accolades and recognitions he richly deserved, the Environmental Protection Agency honored him with their Lifetime Achievement Award. The Massachusetts – Rhode Island Regional Poison Control Center named their conference room in his honor and the Library in the Emergency Department was dedicated in his name, both post-humously.

Michael Shannon supported many charities. He taught in a group that counseled teenagers about the tough choices in life and the risks of drugs, alcohol and promiscuous sex. He was an active member of the First Parish Church in Brookline. He leaves his devoted wife Elaine of 23 years, his son Evan, an aspiring physician, and his daughter Lila, both attending Stanford University at the time of his death.

Michael Shannon will be remembered by his colleagues for his remarkable character and magnificent personal attributes. He will be remembered for his generous and engaging personality, his warm and welcoming smile, his joyful approach to his work, his constructive and insightful suggestions to his colleagues, his scientific rigor and integrity, and his steady, calm and graceful demeanor. He will be remembered for his crisp white coat, his broad shoulders and erect posture, his perfect bow tie, and his debonair manner. He was a remarkable presence whether at the podium, in a conference room or at the bedside of a patient. As one of his close colleagues so aptly reflected at the time of his death, he enabled all of the players around him to rise to a higher level and we were all enriched by knowing Michael Shannon.

Respectfully submitted,

Frederick H. Lovejoy, Jr., *Chairperson*

Joel J. Alpert

Gary R. Fleisher

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