



Morton N. Swartz



Morton N. Swartz, Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School and former Chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Massachusetts General Hospital, passed away on September 9, 2013 of complications of kidney failure. Mort Swartz was a truly remarkable man, a unique figure in medicine, science, and Infectious Diseases, and a legendary figure at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School.

Mort was born in Dorchester in 1923 and educated in the public schools of Brookline. His father, Dr. Jacob H. Swartz, was a dermatologist in Boston, who was on the staff at MGH and a model for Mort as a thoughtful and caring physician. In 1941, at age 18, Mort entered the Navy through an accelerated World War 2 program that allowed him to complete his undergraduate degree at Harvard College in just two years, serve as a hospital corpsman in the Navy, and then return to enter Harvard Medical School in 1944 as an ensign. He received his MD degree three years later. After medical school, Mort began at the MGH in 1947 as an intern. His three years of residency in Medicine were followed by a research fellowship in cellular

metabolism. However, this research training was disrupted in 1951 when Mort was again called into military service, this time as a First Lieutenant and Medical Officer in a Field Artillery group in the Korean War. Mort returned to the MGH in 1953 and served for one year as Chief Resident before going to Johns Hopkins for two years of additional research training in biochemistry.

The Chairman of Medicine at MGH in the 1950's was Dr. Walter Bauer, a man that Mort revered. Dr. Bauer asked Mort to return from Hopkins and to start a new division in the Department of Medicine at MGH, in the new specialty of Infectious Diseases. Mort accepted the invitation and returned in 1956. Initially, Mort was the only faculty member in the division and he personally delivered outstanding infectious disease care on all of the adult and pediatric services of the hospital, as well establishing his own research program. Mort's mentor in his new specialty was Dr. Louis Weinstein, another giant in the field of

Infectious Diseases and a man Mort often credited as his own mentor in the field. Mort was subsequently joined by other faculty members in the growing division. Mort deepened his research knowledge and training with two sabbaticals in 1960-61 and 1969-70, working in the lab of Nobel laureate Arthur Kornberg at Stanford, another major mentor in Mort's life.

Mort served as the Chief of Infectious Diseases at MGH for 34 years, from 1956 to 1990, and built the division into an internationally recognized clinical and research center of excellence. Mort was one of the fathers of Infectious Diseases as a discipline, not just at the MGH but across the US. But Mort never took the certifying exam in Infectious Diseases that everyone now takes. He trained before Infectious Diseases was a recognized specialty and he largely wrote the subsequent examinations. During his 34 years as Chief, thousands of individuals had the rare privilege of working with and learning from Mort. Many of the people he trained went on to set up Infectious Disease Divisions at other institutions, and have subsequently gone on to take additional leadership positions around the country and indeed around the world. Always in demand, Mort was a visiting professor at innumerable institutions in the United States and abroad. A scholar at heart, Mort's reviews and articles (with colleagues) about meningitis, osteomyelitis, subacute bacterial endocarditis, anthrax (after the 2001 attacks via the mail) and other diseases helped to define how we think about these disorders and spread his wisdom around the world.

Over his career in Infectious Diseases, Mort received virtually all the awards and honors one can imagine. He was elected to Membership in the American Society for Clinical Investigation, the Association of American Physicians, and the Institute of Medicine. He received the Bristol Award for Lifetime Achievement in Infectious Diseases from the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and served as the President of that Society in the 1980s. He received the Distinguished Teacher Award and was elected to Mastership in the American College of Physicians. He also received the MGH Trustees Medal in 2011 during the hospital's bicentennial.

In 1990, Mort stepped down as Chief of Infectious Diseases and became the James Jackson Firm Chief in the Department of Medicine, a position in which each day he taught clinical medicine, pathophysiology, and perhaps most importantly, humanism to literally hundreds of medical residents and medical students at the bedside. Many of those individuals have pointed to Mort as the single most important figure in their career development as a physician. Fittingly, the residency program at MGH has named an award in humanism after Mort, the Morton N. Swartz Humanism Award given annually.

In 2002, Mort stepped down as the James Jackson Firm Chief but continued to be active in the Department, leading and then attending medical grand rounds and often asking the most insightful and undoubtedly the most challenging questions at the end of the talk. Mort's questions not only demonstrated his amazingly deep understanding of the field, but they also pushed the bounds of current knowledge with great insight and foresight.

At the MGH, it was often said that while Mort was unsurpassed as an expert in Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, he was "second best" in some areas. So, it was said that Mort was the second best dermatologist at the MGH-after Thomas Fitzpatrick (the former Chief of Dermatology), the second best neurologist-after Raymond D. Adams (the former Chief of Neurology) and the second best pathologist-after Benjamin Castleman (the former Chief of Pathology).

Mort was inspirational. He had an intuitive ability to take the same information everybody else had and put it together in a way that would solve a problem that had eluded others. One of the particularly

enjoyable things about training with Mort is that not only could he tell you what the answer was, but he could explain what it was about the information that led him to that conclusion, teaching clinical reasoning. He also had a wonderful ability to help you think through a puzzle, guiding and probing you with subtle questions along the way until you actually thought that you had solved the puzzle, only to realize later that he had held your hand and gently steered you to the center of the maze. Mort was a true teacher in every sense. He stuck by his trainees, cared for them and shaped them. And he was so proud of their accomplishments. He was driven not by ambition but by the pursuit of excellence.

Mort was so much more than an extraordinarily brilliant physician. His knowledge, in fact, was encyclopedic and far-reaching. And not just in medicine and science. Indeed, Mort knew more about the cosmos, physics, biological diversity, philosophy and even sports -- particularly his beloved Boston Celtics -- than anyone else we have ever met. He loved great music, had a broad knowledge of classical music and, some thought, was the best music critic in Boston. In addition to his prodigious intellect, he was amazingly humble, with a great wry sense of humor. Mort loved a good joke.

Mort's wife Cesia was, like Mort, a brilliant, humble and kind person. Mort and Cesia met through mutual friends at the McCollum-Pratt Institute at Johns Hopkins while Mort was there for his post-doctoral training in biochemistry and Cesia was working as a laboratory technician. Mort and Cesia had two children, Mark and Caroline, who have warm memories of their vacations together, particularly in California when Mort was at Stanford. Cesia was a beloved member of the MGH community.

Those who knew, learned from, worked with and loved Mort shared the incredible privilege of being in the presence of a true giant. That giant's ever gentle voice is now silent but Mort will never be forgotten. He helped shape and define the specialty of Infectious Diseases as well as train multiple generations of physicians. All who knew Mort are grateful for the precious time spent with him. We are better doctors, better teachers, better colleagues, better people because Mort taught us. He enriched our lives and is part of each of us.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen B. Calderwood, *Chairperson*

David C. Hooper

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