



Michael J. Zinner



Michael Zinner was born in Miami Beach and graduated from Coral Gables Senior High in 1963. He studied engineering as an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins University, where he was briefly a news radio host and actor. He subsequently earned his MD from the University of Florida-Gainesville in 1971. He completed his surgical training at Johns Hopkins and, during the Vietnam War era, served at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. There he initiated what was to become a highly productive, NIH-funded investigative effort in gastrointestinal physiology.

Dr. Zinner's career in academic surgery was defined by exceptional leadership across multiple premier institutions. After an initial faculty position at SUNY-Downstate, he returned to Hopkins as Vice Chair of Surgery. At the age of 42, he was recruited to be Chair the Department of Surgery at UCLA. In 1994, he assumed a position as surgeon-in-chief at Brigham and Women's Hospital, chair of the Brigham Department of Surgery, clinical director of the Dana-Farber/Brigham and Women's Cancer Center, and Moseley Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School, roles he held for 22

years. His skill at collaboration and negotiation laid the groundwork for the affiliations between BWH and the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Faulkner Hospital, and South Shore Hospital. In 2015, he returned to Miami as the founding CEO and executive medical director of the Miami Cancer Institute at Baptist Health South Florida. In 2024, he helped break ground on a new 115,000-square-foot facility named the Al and Jane Nahmad Women's Cancer Center at Miami Cancer Institute. In each of his leadership roles, he successfully transformed complex and evolving clinical enterprises into financially stable, academically rigorous, and nationally influential departments. His leadership advanced surgical scholarship, expanded faculty diversity, strengthened clinical programs, and created enduring infrastructures for research and innovation, including the establishment of the Harvard Center for Surgery and Public Health.

Mike held leadership roles in virtually every major academic surgical organization in the United States. He

*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**.*

was president of the Association for Academic Surgery, the Society of University Surgeons, the Society of Surgical Chairs, the Halsted Society, the James IV Society, and the New England Surgical Society. He also served as Chair of the American College of Surgeons Board of Governors and of the Board of Regents. His service reflected a deep commitment to the mission and the advancement of academic surgery nationally. He was a trusted statesman within the surgical community whose counsel shaped policies, programs, and leadership development for decades.

Equally significant was Dr. Zinner's unparalleled commitment to surgical education and mentorship. Over the course of his career, more than 200 surgeons trained under his leadership, the majority of whom pursued academic careers. An extraordinary number have gone on to become department chairs, division chiefs, national society presidents, and leaders in surgical research, education, and health policy. Mike liked to say he was, "in the young people business," and his mentorship was characterized by generosity, discernment, and an uncommon ability to empower others. Mike was a "door opener," a mentor who would provide support and create connections and then get out of the way, enabling the mentee to succeed and receive the credit. Mike encouraged novel academic pursuits, such as global surgery, health services research, and education scholarship. When a trainee or young faculty came with a new idea to pursue, Mike would say "I'm not sure you can make an academic career out of that, but I'm willing to help you try."

Dr. Zinner was also a tireless advocate for equity, inclusion, and opportunity within academic surgery. His recruitment practices, mentorship of women and underrepresented faculty, and national recognition for advancing women in academic medicine speak to a legacy that continues to influence the profession in meaningful ways. Among his many accolades he received the Joseph B. Martin Dean's Award for the Advancement of Women from Harvard Medical School, the National Award for the Advancement of Women from the Association of Women Surgeons, and the ACS Division of Education Award for Commitment to Surgery Resident Education. He is an honorary member of the Society of Black Academic Surgeons. He sponsored the development of the Surgical Outcomes Club, among the only forums devoted solely to surgical health services research.

Mike had many other interests—he was a fisherman, accomplished chef, restaurateur, art collector, and trusted friend—but nothing was more important to him than his family. He was the consummate host, all were welcome and truly fortunate to have a place at his table. This value of family translated at department social events. The Department of Surgery holiday party was an annual highlight not only for department members but also their spouses and children, as Mike dedicated an entire section for children and family activities and then spent most of his evening socializing with them. He took such joy in sharing ideas, experiences, and advice with his children and grandchildren. Ironically, he lost his beloved wife, Ronny, to pancreatic cancer, perhaps his most significant clinical focus, before diagnosing his own stage IV pancreatic cancer in 2024. He is survived by his sons Darren and Dan Zinner; stepchildren Jen Herman and Jon Segal; sister Karen Zinner, and five grandchildren.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Zara R. Cooper, MD, MSc
Douglas Smink, MD
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