



THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE
Harvard University

R. Bruce Donoff



Dr. Robert Bruce Donoff, Walter C. Guralnick Distinguished Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery (OMS) and Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor died on December 25, 2025, at the age of 83 years. He served as Chief of OMS at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) from 1983-1992 and Dean of Harvard School of Dental Medicine (HSDM) for 28 years (1991-2019). He was a renowned surgeon, researcher and educator and remained active at HSDM and the MGH as a teacher and mentor throughout his entire career of 51 years.

Dr. Donoff was born on May 11, 1942 in Brooklyn, New York. He was an only child, the son of a schoolteacher and a printing company manager. He attended Erasmus Hall High School and then Brooklyn College, where, he fondly remembered, the tuition was \$28.50 per semester. It was there that he met Madelyn (Mady) Borchalter who subsequently became his wife, companion, supporter, and best friend for 61 years.

Dr. Donoff received his DMD from HSDM in 1967 and was accepted as an Intern in Oral Surgery upon graduation. He completed the residency program in 1970 and joined the staff at

the MGH as Clinical and Research Fellow in OMS. In 1971, when the MD OMS program was initiated, he, along with three fellow residents, was enrolled with advanced standing. Graduating in 1973, he completed an additional year of General Surgery at the MGH before being recruited to the clinical faculty by Dr Walter Guralnick, his long-time mentor and colleague.

In 1983, Dr. Donoff was appointed Professor and Chief of OMS at the MGH and HSDM. In 1990, he became a fellow of the American College of Surgeons, one of the earliest oral & maxillofacial surgeons to achieve this status. In 1994, he was appointed the inaugural WC Guralnick Professor of OMS at HSDM and the MGH. During his tenure, the Department grew to include faculty at Boston Children's, Beth Israel, and Brigham and Women's Hospitals. The number of residents increased to 3 per year, with a total of 18

*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**.*

enrolled in the 5-year (for HSDM graduates) or 6-year (non-HSDM graduates) OMS/MD tracks. The clinical practice expanded to include a large volume and scope of orthognathic surgery, jaw pathology, salivary gland disease, trauma, pre-prosthetic surgery, dental implants, microsurgical nerve repair, and pediatric cases.

Dr. Donoff started a laboratory research program, and the Department received NIH and philanthropic funding for studies of wound healing and the role of collagenase in the behavior of various jaw cysts. This expanded the department's research activity and encouraged involvement of young faculty and residents. Dr. Donoff stepped down as Chief of OMS in 1992 to serve as Dean of HSDM.

He maintained his MGH appointment and remained clinically active particularly in the areas of microsurgical nerve repair, salivary gland disease and oral cancer. His major contributions to HSDM included construction of the Research and Education Building, expansion of the funded research program with recruited research faculty, enlarging the HSDM class to 35 students per year, re-instatement of the 4-year DMD curriculum, and expansion of the HSDM dental clinics with an emphasis on the integration of general dentistry and oral health into primary care medicine. Dr Donoff was also a strong supporter of the Orofacial Pain (OFP) undergraduate curriculum and the OFP DMedSc and Certificate track postdoctoral training programs. These efforts reflected his enduring mission of integrating dentistry, medicine, and overall health, a vision for which he received the prestigious William J. Gies Foundation Award from the American Dental Education Association in 2004

Over the years, his students experienced firsthand the culture he cultivated as Dean—one defined not only by rigor, but by expectation. HSDM students were being prepared not only to practice, but to lead and to advance the profession. He made clear that clinical excellence, scholarship, and leadership were inseparable. He would famously tell HSDM students that the school was preparing them for “careers that do not yet exist.” What left the greatest impression on students was his mantra of research as a responsibility. His talk to first year students, in which he dramatically described the feeling that researchers attain when they discover something new, was legendary.

After 1998, Dr. Donoff was appointed Walter C. Guralnick Distinguished Professor of OMS and in 2020 Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor. He continued mentoring and advising students and faculty. He has had a major impact locally, nationally, and internationally—in dentistry, dental education, and OMS. With Alpha Omega, he spearheaded work across borders, with a desire to extend oral health care to the world's under-served populations.

Dr. Donoff was not only a renowned academic leader, but also a compassionate and talented clinician, a mentor to generations of students, and a visionary who was a lifelong advocate for the integration of dentistry and medicine. He viewed oral health as integral to overall health and well-being and launched the HSDM Initiative to Integrate Oral Health and Medicine. This program, which continues in his honor, has produced a substantive body of work supporting his interdisciplinary vision and advancing the state of the science across education, policy, and clinical practice.

Dr. Donoff is survived by his wife Mady, daughter Elizabeth, son Daniel, and sister-in-law Alice Borchalter. His life was enriched by his family and the times they spent together at their home on Cape Cod, where Bruce enjoyed family, golf, tennis and reading. He was also a contributor to the broader community as he and Mady had long term leadership roles in their synagogue in Newton. Dean Bruce Donoff's influence will continue to resonate across our MGH and Harvard University

communities and throughout the broader field of dental medicine for generations to come. He was a leader, teacher, innovator and dear mentor to many generations.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard B. Kaban, DMD, MD *Chairperson*

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