



William F. Bernhard



Photograph courtesy of the Boston Children's Hospital Archives

William F. Bernhard was born in Brooklyn, New York and graduated with an M.D. from Upstate Medical University in Syracuse. He completed general and thoracic surgery residencies at Bellevue Hospital and New York Presbyterian Hospital. Dr. Bernhard was recruited to Boston Children's Hospital by Robert Gross, a pioneering pediatric heart surgeon. Dr. Bernhard formed the Boston Children's Hospital Cardiovascular Research Laboratory. His initial work assessed the use of the hyperbaric chamber to treat hypoxia during open heart surgery. He made medical history when he was called to treat the premature child of then President John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. Bernhard and three colleagues took the child into the hyperbaric chamber in an effort to save his life. The

media attention generated by this event led to increased research into the treatment of respiratory distress of premature infants and helped advance the field.

Bernhard was an inventor of several medical devices, the most notable being the first Ventricular Assist Device to be successfully implanted in a human, which was announced to the world in 1978 at an American Heart Association meeting. Dr. Bernhard's work on this novel pneumatic driven assist device was supported by NIH funding, and he completed the long term clinical trials demonstrating its efficacy. The device was then taken up by Thermo Cardiosystems and Thoratec to bring the "Heartmate" LVAD for clinical application, a later generation of which continues to be used today, saving tens of thousands of lives.

Dr. Bernhard published over fifty articles in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and the *Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*, and his work was the subject of television programs including CBS' "60 Minutes", and PBS' "Nova". He was Senior Associate in Cardiovascular Surgery at Boston Children's Hospital and Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Bernhard died on October 29, 2018 at the age of 93, and is survived by his wife June, nine children, fifteen grandchildren and one great grandson.

*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**.*

Respectfully submitted,

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Robert C. Shamberger, MD