



THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE
Harvard University

Michael P. O'Leary



Photograph courtesy of The Boston Athletic Association

Dr. Michael P. O'Leary, a distinguished Boston urologist, educator, civic leader, and devoted husband, father, and grandfather, died on July 4, 2026, in Marion, Massachusetts, at the age of 74, following a brief illness with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. His death marked the loss of an exceptional physician whose career was defined by clinical excellence, scholarship, mentorship, public service, and a deep commitment to the people and institutions of Boston.

Born in Framingham, Massachusetts, Michael was raised in a family with deep ties to medicine and education. He attended Governor Dummer Academy and Harvard College before earning his medical degree from George Washington University School of Medicine and a Master of Public Health from Harvard University. He returned to Boston for postgraduate training,

completing residencies at Tufts/New England Medical Center and Massachusetts General Hospital, followed by the combined UCSF/Stanford Robert Woods Johnson Clinical Scholars Program.

For more than 30 years, Mike devoted himself to patient care, surgical science, and the education of future physicians. After joining Brigham and Women's Hospital in 1993, he rose through the academic ranks to become Professor of Surgery in 2009. He became an internationally recognized leader in urology, particularly for his pioneering work in patient-reported outcomes.

Long before patient-reported outcomes became central to clinical research, Dr. O'Leary recognized that treatment could not be fully evaluated without understanding the patient's experience of disease. He helped develop and validate six instruments that are now used worldwide and have been linguistically and culturally validated in more than a dozen languages. These include the International Prostate Symptom

*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**.*

Score, BPH Impact Index, Brief Male Sexual Function Inventory, NIH Chronic Prostatitis Symptom Index, and Interstitial Cystitis Symptom and Problem Indices. His work transformed subjective urologic symptoms into measurable, reproducible, and clinically meaningful outcomes and helped shape both clinical investigation and everyday patient care in BPH, sexual dysfunction, and men's health.

His influence extended well beyond these landmark instruments. His research was supported by NIH/NIDDK grants and major clinical trials, and he authored more than 200 peer-reviewed publications, including work published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *JAMA*. At Brigham and Women's Hospital, he founded and directed the Men's Health Clinic. He also served the profession through American Urological Association (AUA) committees, the American Board of Urology Examination Committee, NIH/NIDDK data safety and monitoring boards, WHO committees, and numerous editorial boards.

Perhaps his most enduring professional legacy, however, was the physicians he taught and mentored. Michael was an enthusiastic and generous mentor to trainees at every level and to junior colleagues, many of whom went on to assume prominent academic and national leadership roles. One colleague recalled:

"We shared an office for years, and between clinical questions and easy conversation, he taught me the most important lessons about how to be a physician—how to listen and how to be present for patients. He also taught me what a mentor should be—always on the lookout for ways to leverage his lofty position in academia to help those just starting. He modeled intellectual curiosity to the end of his career, always adopting and helping to develop new treatments. I can speak for many of my colleagues when I state we would not be where we are today without him."

Michael's commitment to service extended beyond the walls of the hospital. For years, he traveled regularly to the Navajo Nation in the southwest to provide urologic care to the Diné people through the Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment (COPE) program. Recognizing the persistent gap in access to urologic care, he also trained general surgeons and primary care physicians so they could continue to care for their patients between his visits. This work reflected a fundamental principle that guided his life: medicine carried an obligation to serve wherever the need was greatest.

His son James joined him on one of these trips during college spring break. Working alongside his father, James came to understand that medicine was not simply an occupation to Michael, but a calling. The experience inspired him to pursue medicine and to embrace his father's commitment to service and surgical excellence. James is now a Vascular Surgery Resident at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital.

Michael's commitment to service also shaped his extraordinary involvement with the Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.). Growing up in Framingham along the route of the Boston Marathon, he became an accomplished marathon runner himself. He joined the B.A.A. in 1989, its Board of Governors in 2004, and served as President and Chairman from 2017 to 2023. In these roles, he helped guide an

organization deeply woven into the cultural and civic life of Boston. His leadership reflected his lifelong love of running and his belief in community, volunteerism, and service. He was also on site as the physician in charge of medical services during the Boston Marathon bombings.

Jack Flemming, B.A.A. President and CEO, wrote: “Dr. O’Leary’s passion for the Boston Athletic Association’s mission—especially events and programs beyond the Boston Marathon—was felt in his leadership and direct support of the staff. Drawing from his own profession, he advanced innovative ideas and listened to the predicted results before forming an opinion on ways forward for the B.A.A.”

Golf was another of Mike’s great passions. He played throughout his life and approached the game much as he approached everything else—with dedication, discipline, humor, and a desire to improve. He was everyone’s favorite playing partner, known for his grace, encouragement, and incomparable sense of humor. Although he enjoyed the competition, he never took himself or the game too seriously. For Michael, golf was ultimately about friendship: a shared walk, good conversation, laughter, and memories that mattered far more than the score.

For all of his professional accomplishments, however, Michael’s greatest pride was his family. He was the beloved husband of Dr. Kathleen J. Welch, a longtime Brigham anesthesiologist and Harvard faculty member, and a devoted father and grandfather. Michael’s life brought together medicine, scholarship, mentorship, athletics, public service, and family in a way that was uniquely his own. His legacy will endure in the physicians he trained, the patients he cared for, the institutions he strengthened, and, most importantly, in the family, colleagues, and friends whose lives he touched. He will be remembered not simply for what he accomplished, but for how he made those around him better—through his generosity, curiosity, humor, and unwavering commitment to others.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Belkin MD, *Chairperson*

Adam Kibel, MD

Martin Kathrins, MD

James O’leary, MD (son)



