MEMORIAL

LAWRENCE SCHERR, MD
1928–2012

Dr. Lawrence Scherr, who retired in 2010 as the Betsey Cushing Whitney Academic Dean Emeritus and Historian at the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System in Great Neck, New York, died from pneumonia September 6, 2012 at Glen Cove Hospital. He was 83. Lawrence Scherr was born in Brooklyn, New York, the son of Harry and Sophie Schwartz. He graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School (a.k.a. “Tech”) in 1946 and received an engineering degree from Cornell University in 1950. He served in active combat in Korea as an officer in the United States Navy Amphibious Force. Dr Scherr received his MD from Cornell University Medical College in 1957, and completed his residency training at the Second (Cornell) Division of cxx
Bellevue Hospital in New York City. He became a Cornell faculty member at Bellevue, and several years later, with the encouragement of Saul Farber, MD, he moved (ostensibly on a temporary basis) to North Shore Hospital to begin the development of a hospital-based Department of Medicine. North Shore was initially a 169-bed community hospital, which expanded to 286 beds in 1963, and currently is an 812-bed institution with nearly 50,000 admissions per year. Despite his original plan to stay briefly at North Shore, Larry never left! He served at North Shore for 43 years, spearheading North Shore Hospital’s growth into a major metropolitan area institution. In 1997, the North Shore Health System and the Long Island Jewish Medical Center merged to become the third largest not-for-profit academic health care system in the United States.

From 1967 to December 31, 2000, Dr Scherr served as Chair of the North Shore University Hospital (NSUH) Department of Medicine. Larry was centrally involved in the development of the academic affiliation with Cornell Medical College (1969), where he served as Professor of Medicine (and subsequently was named Professor Emeritus at Cornell). After “philosophical differences” arose between Cornell Medical College and North Shore, Dr Scherr spearheaded a new academic affiliation with the New York University School of Medicine (1994), where he served as the David J. Greene Professor of Medicine. Upon stepping down as department chair at the end of 2000, he continued to serve as senior vice president for academic affairs. While maintaining North Shore University Hospital’s academic affiliation with the NYU School of Medicine, Larry worked to expand the existing academic affiliation of Long Island Jewish Medical Center with the Albert Einstein College of Medicine (AECOM) of Yeshiva University. In April 2004, a new Einstein affiliation with the North Shore–Long Island Jewish (LIJ) Health System provided the opportunity for undergraduate medical students at Einstein to complete clinical rotations at both North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset and LIJ Medical Center in New Hyde Park. Larry always believed that Long Island needed a second allopathic medical school, and in March 2008, his vision became reality with the establishment of the Hofstra University School of Medicine in Partnership with the North Shore–LIJ Health System. Before his retirement in 2010, Dr Scherr was named the Betsey Cushing Whitney Academic Dean Emeritus and Historian. He was preparing a history of the health system, addressing improved access to healthcare and health outcomes, and chairing the North Shore University Hospital Ethics Committee.
Dr Scherr commented on his career path as follows when queried by the AMA (http://www.ama-assn.org/resources/doc/spg/scherr.pdf):

Is there one patient, situation or incident that stands out above all others in your career? If you accept that patients come first, then there are multiple situations of patients who are deemed futile by others, who with diligent care, recover.

Dr Scherr’s work as a clinician/investigator led to a number of important peer-reviewed contributions to the medical literature. While he was a Cornell medical student, he published (as third author) a paper which called attention to the 25% prevalence of hypertension in mothers experiencing toxemia of pregnancy. Other publication highlights include Larry’s initial first author paper. In it, Dr Scherr and co-authors described the use of “a sulfonic polystyrene cation-exchange resin in the sodium cycle for the control of hyperpotassemia in both acute and chronic renal disease.” Focusing on acute myocardial infarction, Dr Scherr and colleagues at North Shore University Hospital and Cornell Medical College examined the role of digitalis in acute MI, correlated radionuclide estimates of infarct size with the release of creatine kinase–MB, and examined the rapid release of CK-MB in acute MI in relationship to left ventricular function and evidence for spontaneous reperfusion.

As a member of the American Board of Internal Medicine, Dr Scherr participated in the development and implementation of the Board’s policy of time-limited certification and recertification. Dr Scherr served as Governor of the New York Downstate Region of the American College of Physicians, Past Chair of the Board of Regents of the ACP, and President Emeritus of the American College of Physicians. Dr Scherr was elevated to Mastership in the ACP in 1988. He was also a past Officer of the American Board of Internal Medicine and the American Board of Medical Specialties. He served as Chairman, Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, and Chairman of the Residency Review Committee in Internal Medicine. Larry was a member of the Board of Governors (2010) of the Health Care Trustees of New York State. In addition, he served on the New York State Health Commissioner’s Task Force on Health Reform and the Association of American Medical Colleges’ Committee on Health Care Reform. Dr Scherr was Chairman of the New York State Board for Medicine and Chairman of the New York State Council on Graduate Medical Education. He was a member of President Clinton’s White House Review Group on health care reform. He became a member of the American Clinical and Climatological Association in 1983.
In 2006, The Department of Medicine at NSUH dedicated its annual residents’ and fellows’ academic competition to Larry, stating that:

Dr Scherr is a loyal, dedicated and hard-working icon, a master clinician-educator, a gentleman with extraordinary political capabilities and unique administrative talents. His remarkable perseverance and abiding belief in the strength and ultimate success of the Department of Medicine and our institution is henceforth recognized by naming our annual resident & fellow academic recognition event in his honor.

The Lawrence Scherr, MD, Professorship of Medicine at the Hofstra North Shore–LIJ School of Medicine was endowed to honor his dedicated service as a physician, educator, and leader. In 2011, Dr Scherr received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the NSUH Medical Staff Society in recognition of his commitment to the highest standards of the medical profession, mentoring of countless colleagues, exceptional devotion to patients, and his role in establishing NSUH as a pre-eminent institution.

Dr Scherr’s medical expertise, vision, dedication, tireless energy, unparalleled work ethic, unique leadership skills, and unwavering commitment to North Shore Hospital led to its amazing growth from a small community hospital to an academic and clinical powerhouse which is the flagship of one of America’s pre-eminent health systems. He will always be remembered for these unique contributions. Larry is survived by his devoted wife Peggy, daughter Cynthia Rosen and her husband Alan, son Robert Scherr, and grandchildren Ben, Sophie, Sabrina, and Natalie.

Stephan Kamholz, MD

REFERENCES