Barton Kamen: In Memoriam

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Barton Kamen, M.D., Ph.D., passed away on September 27, 2012, at age 63 after his own courageous battle with cancer. Bart was a clinical professor of pediatrics and pharmacology, and former chief of the Division of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey/Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. He graduated from Case Western University and then was accepted in the M.D./Ph.D. program at Case Western University Medical School.

After graduating from Case Western Reserve University Medical School, Dr. Kamen came to Yale for his pediatric residency. I first met Bart when he came to my office in the Yale Pharmacology Department one day in 1978 and asked about joining the laboratory. After a few minutes, I realized that he was terribly bright and passionate about science, so I quickly offered him a position. His previous Ph.D. work had centered on folate-binding proteins, and his work in my laboratory at Yale broadened his interest in folate biochemistry. He made significant contributions over the years in both fields, and he has been widely sought after as a lecturer and consultant for his expertise in both areas. It was during this fellowship year that golf became another lifetime passion for him, and we often played nine holes at Yale early in the mornings before work.

After his fellowship, Bart accepted an assistant professor position with Bruce Camitta in Wisconsin. Three years later, he joined the faculty at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center where he was the Carl B. and Florence E. King Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics and Pharmacology. At Southwestern, Bart and his colleagues demonstrated the functions and tissue and tumor distribution of the folate binding protein now known as FBP α . These studies have led to the trials of antibodies to this protein to treat ovarian cancer, as well as the use of folic acid linked to toxins to target and treat ovarian cancer.

After 18 years in Texas, Bart was recruited by William Hait, the director of the newly formed Cancer Institute of New Jersey and the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, in 1999 to build the

Barton Kamen, 1948–2012

pediatric hematology and oncology program. During the next 8 years, under his leadership, the faculty increased from three to nine members and the program became one of the premier pediatric hematology/oncology programs in the country.

Dr. Kamen and Dr. Peter Cole, one of his recruits, studied neurotoxicity from methotrexate. They showed that dextromethorphan, found in some cough medicines, and caffeine could reverse some types of methotrexate toxicity. This work in part led him to reinvestigate aminopterin as a more potent drug than methotrexate with less neurotoxicity. During this time, he also developed an interest in metronomic therapy and became one of the experts and proponents of this low-dose continuous therapy concept.

Bart received many awards for his research, including a Damon Runyon Walter Winchell Fellowship, a Scholar Award from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and a Burroughs Wellcome Clinical Pharmacology Award. Bart also was an American Cancer Society Clinical Research Professor, the first pediatrician to be honored with this award.

His incredible energy and passion for science is reflected in more than 200 publications. He was the editor for the *Journal of Pediatric Hematology Oncology*, for which he often contributed thoughtful editorials—the last one dealing with his own disease [J Pediatr Hematol Oncol 2012;34:1]. From the time of his diagnosis in May 2011 until he required hospitalization in September, he continued working, playing golf, and dealt amazingly well with the side effects of treatments that unfortunately did not stop the progress of his disease.

An important colleague was his famous engineer brother Dean, with whom Bart worked on the development of the insulin pump. On other projects with Dean, he provided key biological insights. His other brother Mitchell is a talented musician, and his sister, Terri Kamen Schuler, is a successful businesswoman. His mother, Evelyn Kamen, lives in Boca Raton, Florida. His father, Jack, who died in 2008, was a well-known artist and illustrator for comics.

Bart's motivation as a physician scientist was focused on finding better treatment for his patients. He used magic tricks to break down their fears, and he became their friend for life. Nothing pleased him more than to see a patient he treated years ago return, cured of his or her disease. We miss Bart's bad jokes, his "out-of-the-box thinking," and his passion for science, which was second only to his love and caring for his wife, Ruth, and his daughter, Libby.

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