Thoughts on Dr. Karl Nolph

As many others across the world, I was truly saddened to hear about Dr. Nolph's death. Dr. Nolph was instrumental in my life as a nephrologist. As a young attending physician at Wake Forest University, I was unexpectedly assigned to be Medical Director of our outpatient dialysis unit. We had a large peritoneal dialysis population for which I suddenly was responsible. At that time in my academic career, I was planning on being a transplant nephrologist. Luckily for me, I sought help in peritoneal dialysis from Dr. Nolph. In doing so, I didn't just get some advice, I actually met Dr. Nolph. That was a sentinel event in my life, because once you meet Dr. Nolph it is not just for a moment, it is generally a long-term commitment. Those early interactions resulted in me changing my academic life plan from a transplant doc to a PD doc. Basically I wanted to grow up and try to be like Dr. Nolph. I hope he felt honored by that. I know I was not the only one with those same thoughts.

Dr. Nolph was an exceptional human being. On a personal level, I can say the following: he mentored me from a distance (he in Missouri, me in North Carolina); he always listened and never suggested an idea was stupid or ridiculous, saying "Oh, well did it work?" or "interesting," or "we would do this," or "others would do this." In this way, he was mentoring and teaching in a way that always encouraged. He often included me as a speaker in meetings or in studies he was conducting. He always stopped to talk when we would run into each other at a meeting even though he was obviously very busy. I would not have been able to accomplish half of what I have without his gentle help and support.

I know I am not the only one who would say these things. I speak for countless others who are like-minded. Karl, if I may call him by his first name, was an exceptional man. He was a friend to many. He mentored many. He was hands-on with his patients and his peers. He accomplished a great deal, more than most CVs can hold. He and his group were the epicenter of peritoneal dialysis in the United States. He made many discoveries and observations, at least one of which, when further investigated by others, was finally proven and eventually was associated with a Nobel prize. As we all know, he was a key figure in the development of peritoneal dialysis, leading research in this area, promoting it academically and encouraging its use not only in the United States but also globally. In doing so, he was instrumental in improving the lives of thousands of people around the world, many of whom would not have had renal replacement therapy if peritoneal dialysis was not available. He was a husband, a father and a musician among other things.

We can go on and on. The key point is that he did all this in the most humble way. It was never about Dr. Nolph, it was always about others. As far as the world of peritoneal dialysis is concerned, Dr. Nolph was the Godfather, The Father, and Da Man. But his life was more than peritoneal dialysis; he touched others in all aspects of what he did. He was an exceptional human being and we will miss him. For one more time, good bye Karl.

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