Kenneth D. Bloch, MD (1956–2014)

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On a sunny, beautiful day in September 2014, we gathered in a funeral home in the town of Brookline, Massachusetts, to say a sad good-bye to our beloved friend and colleague, Dr. Kenneth D. Bloch.

Ken was born in New York City on May 17, 1956, and raised in Brookline. After receiving his undergraduate and medical education at Brown University, he began his career as a medical resident at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), followed by a cardiology fellowship and then a position on the division staff in 1990. Two years later, he became an investigator in the Cardiovascular Research Center of MGH.

Ken was a brilliant researcher who made a number of seminal contributions. He characterized the mechanisms of atrial natriuretic peptide and endothelial nitric oxide synthase function as well as the downstream mechanisms of nitric oxide and cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP) signaling. More recently, Ken and colleagues in his laboratory discovered novel functions and mechanisms of action of the bone morphogenetic protein family in relation to cardiovascular disease and anemia of chronic inflammation, identifying this pathway as an important target in human disease. Ken was appointed the William T. G. Morton Professor of Anesthesia at Harvard Medical School in 2007 and Professor of Medicine in 2008.

Ken was much more than a gifted molecular biologist and cardiologist. He had many personal gifts that were truly exceptional and that made him a rare mentor, colleague, and friend. Here are just a few stories.

In our lab meetings, he would listen as we analyzed a problem of applied physiology or biochemistry or molecular biology and struggled with the tougher ones. Almost always, as the discussion ensued Ken would come up with a key insight unlocking the path to the next step in the research. If we got off track, Ken was always the one to gently point the way back to the core problem. Ken never failed to remember a past study by us or others. Even in these last years, as he struggled courageously with cancer,

never once complaining, his memory was extraordinary and unflinching.

Ken was a Pied Piper of scientists. He loved to work with young scientists, always had a flock of young students and physicians/scientists, and spent many hours each day guiding them and counseling them. He did this with the patience of a saint. He also spent untold hours correcting the drafts of papers, and it was not just his fellows' work. We would send Ken what we considered to be a just-about-perfect draft of a new paper, and in about a week we would get it back with 100 or 200 red editorial balloon comments.

Ken was unflappable. He possessed equanimity in the face of any stress. He could logically and sequentially dissect and deal with any issue (and not only the scientific ones) thoughtfully and without losing his calm demeanor. We cannot remember Ken raising his voice, even with the most exasperating people. He dealt sensitively with the toughest problems arising in our lab administration, and we knew he would find a just and proper solution with the fewest ruffled feathers. Ken managed every challenge.

Ken spent his happiest hours in the lab. Each day, including Saturday and Sunday, he would arrive early, before anyone else. He loved to get his hands wet with an experiment or clean out the ice from a freezer. When he was happy all of us knew it—because Ken whistled. Not a tune we recognized, but his happiness was evident to all around him. He glowed when an experiment went well or a fellow or student gave a great talk. We sought his compliments, and he often gave them to us after a great presentation or scientific advance. An “attaboy” from Ken was a proud gold star to any recipient.

Ken leaves behind him a hundred intellectual children from nations around the globe. He brightened our lives with his wisdom, his amazing grasp of science, his carefully and gently articulated insights and opinions, and his remarkable way of helping us express ourselves.

Ken was a bright, steady beacon who lit the way for many of us. So strong and true, his beacon will continue to guide us and give us strength as we carry on our lives, scientific and personal. We can hear him admonishing us to do that and asking us to stop talking about his very private life. Let us go forward, do our science, live our lives and make him proud. To quote Dr. Seuss, that famous

American philosopher we often quoted to our children, "Don't cry because it's over, laugh because it happened!"

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