

Colleagues and Friends Remember David S. Greer, MD

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

David S. Greer, MD, 89, the second dean of medicine at Brown University (1981–1992), died November 18, 2014, just seven weeks after his wife Marion. “This community lost both Dave as well as his wife of six decades. An immense loss – and we are all the poorer,” said **STANLEY M. ARONSON, MD**, Brown’s first dean of medicine.

He described Dr. Greer’s passing as “a profound loss to me and also to Brown University. Dave and I grew up in the same breeding ground, a place called Brooklyn; and we both served in the military during WW II, and were educated by separate branches of the City University of New York.”

Dr. Aronson said the then Program in Medicine recruited Dr. Greer in 1974. “Dave was given the task, as our first associate dean, of assembling the many organizations

subsumed under the collective title of ‘community health.’ And under his supervision an approved residency training program was initiated, one of the finest in the nation. Dave chaired the newly gathered Department of Community Health, an academically vigorous and important impetus in improving the health of Rhode Islanders.”

At Dr. Greer’s funeral service Nov. 21 at Temple Beth El in Fall River, Mass., the city where he began to practice medicine in 1957, **VINCENT MOR, PhD**, professor of health services, policy and practice at Brown, eulogized his longtime mentor and friend as “a giant of a man but with the softness



David S. Greer, MD
[Obituary, page 57](#)



The late Dr. David S. and Marion Greer (center), seated next to Dr. Stanley M. and Gale Aronson (left), attended the May 2014 Alpert Medical School celebration to announce the formation of the Dean Stanley M. Aronson Fund for Research and Innovation. Alpert Medical School Dean Jack A. Elias, MD (at the podium), Brown Chancellor Thomas J. Tisch (far left), former Dean Richard W. Besdine, MD, the Greer Professor in Geriatric Medicine, and Terrie Fox Wetle, PhD (right).

and warmth of a father...I love the memory of meetings at the Greer home, sitting beside him in his study as he edited my turgid prose, telling me that simple language was elegant language; like music, extra notes are a distraction."

He said Dr. Greer recruited him to Brown after starting the Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research in 1980. Dr. Greer had been awarded several major grants to develop gerontology training and to evaluate the emergence of Medicare funding for hospice care. "That was when he made me an offer I couldn't refuse – less money, more work, more responsibility! Fortunately, I was smart enough to realize the value of the opportunity to learn from him."

Dr. Mor said Dr. Greer was a leader, "offering vision, advice and giving direction. He shaped the direction of Brown Medical School and nudged the University itself. He provided an example of how Brown could offer support and energy to Providence and Rhode Island. This outward looking impulse, that now reflects a new value which the University has adopted is a reflection of David Greer, and will remain his legacy." (Read Dr. Mor's eulogy)

In the days following the memorial service, **DAVID C. LEWIS, MD**, said, "Dr. Greer's funeral was a reminder of the love and respect with which he was held in his hometown. He was remembered as a physician who made house calls and always had time to listen to patients and their families, often scheduling urgent appointments late in the afternoon so that he could give his full attention to their needs. He founded one of the first elderly housing complexes linked to a hospital in the country in order to insure continuity of care for the seniors of Fall River."

Dr. Lewis said Dr. Greer's caring and compassion for his patients translated into his role at Brown. "I'm not sure how many medical school deans come directly from a family practice to the dean's office but I doubt there are many. Most are specialists coming directly from academia with backgrounds in research. David Greer's solid clinical grounding allowed him to embrace and lead the academic enterprise without ever forgetting the role and obligation that medicine has in the community – a value that he stressed to the medical students and faculty.

"He sought to reform medical education by establishing a close connection with Brown's undergraduate college and the medical program. Thus was born the PLME (Program in

'David Greer's devotion to his patients in Fall River was legendary. He was rounding on Sunday mornings, making house calls at 10 p.m., possibly riding in an ambulance with a patient at 2 a.m. That level of dedication carries with it the obligation to advance science.'

— *Richard W. Besdine, MD*

Liberal Medical Education) that combined admission to college and medical school," Dr. Lewis reflected.

He worked closely with Dr. Greer when he became dean of the medical school. "I was his surprise pick (a surprise to me as well) to succeed him as Chair of the Department of Community Health," said Dr. Lewis. "We worked closely on expanding the academic program of the department and the clinical teaching program which included a combined clerkship sponsored by Primary Care Internal Medicine at Rhode Island Hospital and Family Medicine at Memorial Hospital."

He said Dr. Greer's help in developing the initial plan for the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies at Brown, was "invaluable."

In 2000, donors and friends of Brown and The Miriam Hospital established the David S. Greer, MD, Professorship in Geriatric Medicine in 2000 to create a lasting legacy for his work. **RICHARD W. BESDINE, MD**, has held this position since its inception and his arrival at Brown. He described his late friend and fellow geriatrician as a "great physician I have had the privilege of knowing."

Dr. Greer was, he said, "incredibly modest but not shy and very direct in his opinions. He never gave me advice; he would simply state his opinion." The two had monthly dinners at the University Club, especially helpful when Dr. Besdine served as interim dean at the medical school for more than three years. "I spoke to him about the dean's role and activities. During those dinners and my one-on-one with him I got to know the person very well; he was an incredibly reliable and loyal friend."

When asked what future physicians might learn from Dr. Greer, Dr. Besdine said, "knowing that medicine begins with the patient. The patient is everything. If you stay close to the patient you will never go astray."

He elaborated that, "honoring the patient with your career dedication is more than providing clinical care. David Greer's devotion to his patients in Fall River was legendary. He was rounding on Sunday mornings, making house calls at 10 p.m., possibly riding in an ambulance with a patient at 2 a.m. That level of dedication carries with it the obligation to advance science. If you are dedicated to your patients, you want to learn more than there's currently known about the best ways to care for them and that is what research is all about. That's what David would say. It's a lifelong commitment." ❖