

Eulogy: David S. Greer

VINCENT MOR

I've been asked to speak about David Greer's career and its impact on Brown Medical School, the country and the world around us. I've known him since the mid 1970's when he first began to drift into the Brown orbit from his busy clinical practice in Fall River.

He left the University of Chicago where he was pursuing a research fellowship to begin private practice in Fall River but he never abandoned the discipline of research. However, he sought to make it more applied, more real, more directly applicable to the people he saw in his everyday practice. When confronted with patients requiring specialized, barrier free housing to remain independent, he sought the funding and political access to build it in Fall River. He was not content with merely building it – he wanted to rigorously document its impact on the residents, his patients. This is how I met him, I was on the team of researchers he worked with under a federal grant to study this unique intervention.

After Dean of Medicine Aronson asked him to become Associate Dean for External Affairs at Brown's new Medical School he continued to engineer applied research, helping Rhode Island plan for the gradual transformation of the state's chronic and mental hospitals in Cranston. I was there as well, working with others, under his tutelage and vision, to develop a plan that deinstitutionalized the hospitals, improved the quality of care for all, resulting in the state being recognized as having the best public mental health system in the country and offering training opportunities to medical and psychiatric students for years.

He started the Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research during an amazing summer in 1980 when he was 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. He was the perfect leader, offering vision, advice and giving direction. 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.

Once the Hospice Study findings were complete, he hosted the federal bureaucrats charged with developing a payment scheme for the new benefit at the "Joe Marzilli's Old Canteen" in Providence. As we designed the benefit on the back of napkins in a private room, Dr. Greer peppered the conversation with anecdotes from the real world of practice to make sure that the design would accommodate real doctors and patients.

The Gerontology Center that he started is now world famous, as is the Center for Alcohol and Addictions which he encouraged David Lewis to start. He understood incentives and how to stimulate those with a vision and desire to build innovative programs. Ultimately, the result is the new Brown School of Public Health where many of these entrepreneurial programs were consolidated.

He became Dean of the Medical School in the early 1980s and out poured a creative litany of initiatives that transformed the school. He developed the Program in Liberal Medical Education, admitting Brown undergraduates directly into medical school with the goal of forging caring physicians who were liberally educated, scientifically oriented and clinically astute. This connected the medical school more closely to the undergraduate college, a completely unique idea at the time that is now increasingly in vogue in medical education. He formalized and expanded the process of giving Rhode Island natives a spot in the medical school by founding and working with the LEAP program designed to help educate Rhode Island and Providence students in order help them succeed at Brown or other medical schools. He became a founding member of the Physicians Against Nuclear War,

capitalizing on the great insight that a careful examination of the consequences of Nuclear War on a community's health care infrastructure could help people envision the horror, making it more real, making the decision to use the bomb less cavalier.

David worked diligently to overcome the "town – gown" conflict in Providence in order to enhance the overall quality of medical care in the state. He could get hospital administrators, who would otherwise cross the street when they saw one another, to sit around the same table once a month to discuss common challenges and solutions by reminding them who they serve.

Institute of Medicine member, Nobel Laureate, scholar, author and funded researcher, he had all the trappings of an accomplished academic. Nonetheless, he was the most down to earth human being you'll ever meet. He consulted, advised and lectured all over the world but came back with stories about the people he met, their foibles, their eccentricities and their basic humanity. He could talk to anyone about anything and he did. I've been blessed to have had almost my entire career under his benevolent gaze and I'm not the only one. He's mentored many in this room; we are all grateful and we will all miss him terribly. He was the first person I would tell when I had a success and the first person I'd seek out for advice when I failed. Such a void; I don't know where I'm going to turn, but to my memories of him and his sage advice.

He was a giant of a man but with the softness and warmth of a father. 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. ❖