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## Growing a Medical School at Brown: Dr. Aronson's recollections

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*[Editor's note: The following commentary first appeared in Medical Odysseys, published in 2012 to celebrate the Rhode Island Medical Society's Bicentennial. Dr. Aronson passed away on January 28, 2015 at the age of 92.]*

Dr. Stanley M. Aronson first came to Rhode Island in 1970. At the time he lived in New Rochelle, N.Y., with his first wife, the late Betty E. Aronson, MD, and their two younger daughters. The public schools in New York, he explained, were in turmoil and the private school applicant list was long. Faced with few school options for the girls, Betty suggested a locale change.

The Miriam Hospital in Providence, the city where Betty had spent her childhood, was seeking a pathologist-in-

**"Dr. Aronson taught us that medicine is the most scientific of the humanities, the most human of the sciences."**

— Jonathan Gell, MD, '75

chief. Aronson, Professor of Pathology and Chairman at Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, and Assistant Dean of its College of Medicine, contacted the East Side hospital and was invited for an interview.

The Miriam's leadership impressed him as decisive, pragmatic and visionary. It was refreshing to be in a hospital that "didn't have its own police force with guns in the halls," Aronson said, unlike the sprawling Kings County Hospital Center, where he had been Director of Laboratories. "Coming to Rhode Island was such a joy. It was

quiet and peaceful. We bought a farm in Rehoboth."

His arrival in 1970 coincided with Brown University's plans to extend its six-year master of medical science program to form a four-year program leading to the M.D. degree within its division of biology and medicine. The prior year Brown had opened a Biomedical center on campus and affiliated with a network of regional hospitals.

It wasn't long after Aronson arrived that Brown invited him to discuss leading the medical school effort. The university was impressed with his credentials and Aronson was intrigued with the challenge of starting a medical school. In 1970, Brown appointed Aronson a Professor of Medical Science and Chairman of its formative Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.

"There was a small faculty of dedicated and enthusiastic pioneers and exceptional students who helped in the design of the program," Aronson said. The tasks were daunting: to develop the network of affiliated teaching hospitals, form a curriculum, organize and recruit faculty/physicians, oversee operating committees and myriad other challenges, not the least of which was securing state funding.

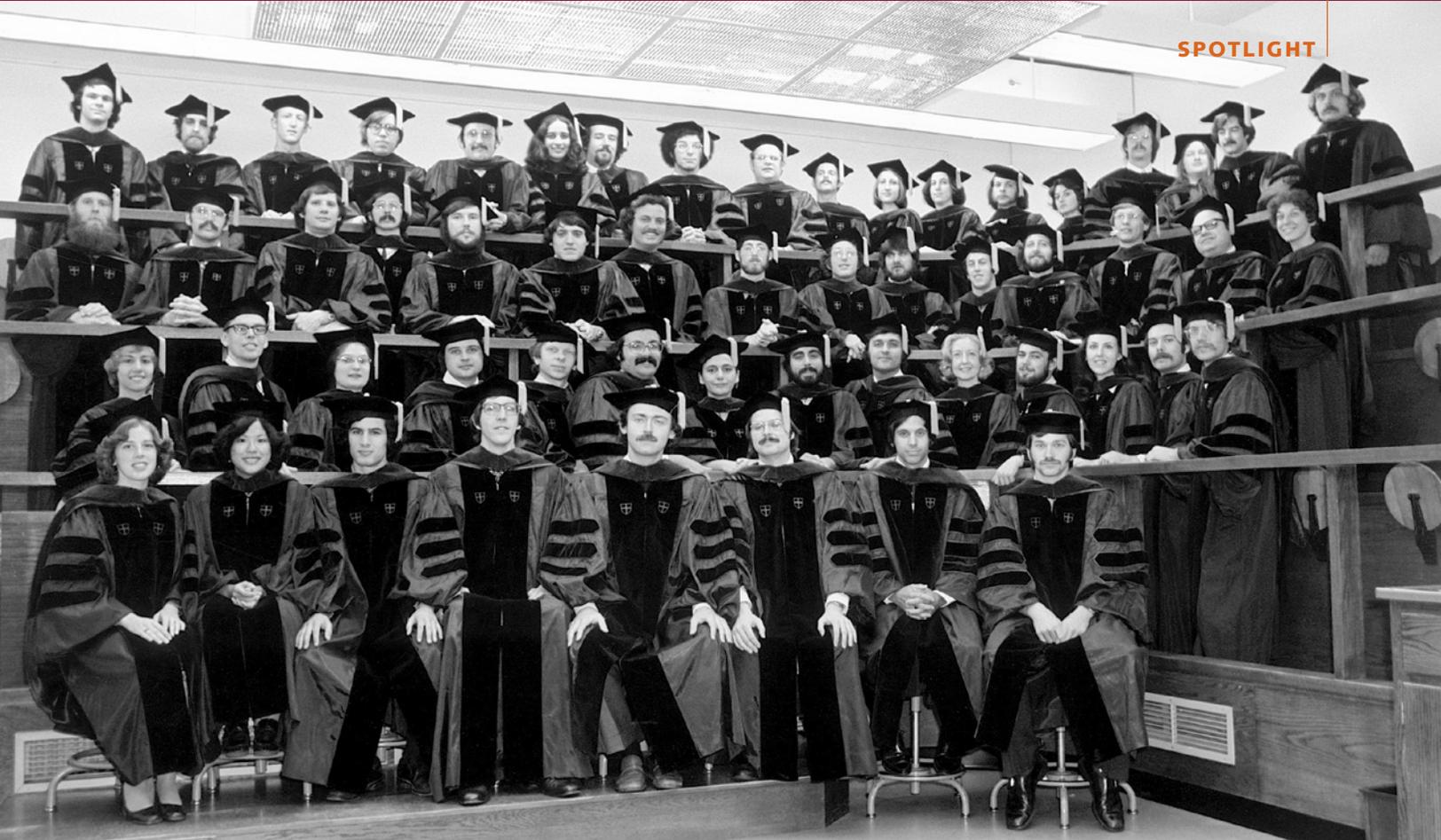
Neighboring states had allocated millions in opening state medical schools that same year. Rhode Island's Gov. Frank Licht was able to secure a small grant of \$245,000 from the State Legislature for the fledgling medical program at Brown and the state medical



The founding dean of Brown's medical school, the late Dr. Stanley M. Aronson, at the first commencement held on June 2, 1975.

society offered strong support as well, by recruiting physicians for the program.

At times, it seemed to Aronson, the medical school was made of "second-hand clothing and held together by scotch tape," he wryly recalled. "The Dean's Office was a cubbyhole in the Biomed building which I shared with my secretary, and the classroom was a former laboratory holding room in the basement of the same building."



Forty years ago, on June 2, 1975, Brown University awarded Doctor of Medicine degrees to 58 students – 45 men and 13 women – the first medical class since the 1820s to pursue and complete academic medical studies and clinical training within Rhode Island's borders.

Aronson juggled multiple leadership positions at the hospital and university, where he also assumed a heavy teaching load. He set up a cot in his Miriam office to catch catnaps when working late – sometimes long past the midnight hour.

In August 1972, Aronson and his small staff set about preparing for a visit from the National Accrediting Liaison Committee of Medical Education, which included preparing the voluminous documentation required for this week-long process.

Lacking host-related funds, “I recruited the students to act as chauffeurs,” Aronson recalled. It would turn out to be an effective strategy. The students were such enthusiastic ambassadors, the Committee made note of them in their report. By October 1972 the school had been granted provisional accreditation. Brown then appointed Aronson its first Dean of Medicine.

The first clinical rotations were in surgery at the Rhode Island and Miriam hospitals. Due to the contributions of volunteer physicians in the Rhode

Island network of hospitals, which also included Memorial Hospital in Pawtucket, and the Lying-In and Roger Williams Hospitals in Providence, the program offered more than a hundred clinical electives. There were also opportunities to participate in medical programs in rural America, at a Native American health center in Arizona, and in Afghanistan and Brazil.

In 1975, the program in medicine received its full accreditation and Brown awarded 58 students the M.D. degree that spring. Aronson shepherded Brown's program in medicine for 11 years, until 1981.

Through the years, the name of the school has changed; it is now the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, named for a benefactor. The location moved off-campus in August 2011 to the jewelry district in Providence.

In January 1999, after 10 years as editor-in-chief of the state medical journal, Aronson retired. The staff, without his knowledge, contacted several of Aronson's early students and asked them to share their recollections.

**ANTHONY CALDAMONE, MD, '75**, remembered a meeting in the Biomed building when the dean wrote his home phone number on the blackboard, and said: “ ‘Call me anytime, day or night, if you have a problem or if you just need to talk.’ ”

**MITCHELL H. DRIESMAN, MD, '77**, described Aronson as “our father figure; with his thoughtful eloquence, his work ethic, his boundless love of all learning.”

“Dean Aronson gave us the strength of faith in ourselves,” **JULIANNE IP, MD, '78**, wrote.

“Dr. Aronson taught us that medicine is the most scientific of the humanities, the most human of the sciences,” noted **JONATHAN GELL, MD, '75**.

Today, the medical school continues to flourish and grow, like the Tree of Hippocrates fronting the Arnold Lab on Waterman Street. Historically known as the learning tree, where Hippocrates taught his students in the shade, it is an apt symbol for both the medical school and its founding dean, who first nurtured it from the “mother” tree in Greece on his Rehoboth farm in 1972. ❖