

[Managing Editor's note: An earlier version of this article appeared in *Medical Odysseys*, an anthology published during the Rhode Island Medical Society's Bicentennial celebration in 2012. The book featured commentary and historical articles written by the late Stanley M. Aronson, MD, who passed away in 2015; Joseph H. Friedman, MD, and Mary Korr.]

50 Years Ago: Dr. Aronson Recalls Formation of Medical School at Brown

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

Stanley M. Aronson, MD, arrived in Rhode Island in 1970, relocating from New Rochelle, NY, with his wife, the late Betty E. Aronson, MD, and their two young daughters. The Miriam Hospital in Providence, the city where Betty had spent her childhood, was seeking a pathologist-in-chief.

Dr. Aronson, a Professor of Pathology 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 in 1969. 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



Dean Aronson presides over Match Day ceremonies for the first MD graduating class of 1975.

halls," Dr. Aronson said in a series of interviews with this writer, 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 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 MD 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.

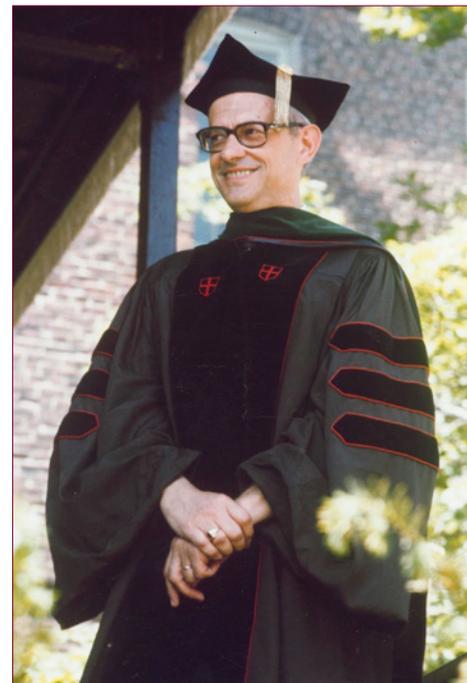
It wasn't long after Dr. Aronson arrived that Brown invited him to discuss leading the medical school effort. The university was impressed with his credentials and Dr. Aronson was intrigued with the challenge of starting a medical school. In 1970, Brown appointed Dr. Aronson a Professor of Medical Science 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," he recalled. The tasks were daunting: to develop the network of affiliated teaching hospitals, design 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. Then 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 Rhode Island Medical Society offered strong support as well, by recruiting physicians for the program.

At times, it seemed to Dr. Aronson, the medical school was made of "second-hand clothing and held together by scotch tape. 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." He 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, Dr. Aronson and his small staff set about preparing for a visit from the National Accrediting Liaison



Dean Aronson in full regalia during a medical school graduation ceremony.



BROWN UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF BIOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL SCIENCES
Providence, Rhode Island 02912
863-3231

A Message from the Dean

BROWN RESUMES PHYSICIAN EDUCATOR ROLE

After 130 years of dormancy Brown University has resumed its role as an educator of physicians. The transition from a graduate school in the medical sciences to a coordinated program culminating in the M.D. degree, took place on the morning of January 31, 1973, when 12 Brown University students donned white coats and assumed their responsibilities as clinical clerks on the surgical services of the Rhode Island and the Miriam Hospitals. When the full clerkship program is operative, medical students will also serve at the Butler, Lying-In, Memorial, Roger Williams General, and Veterans Administration Hospitals.

These 12 charter medical students elected to remain at Brown University rather than take their two years of clinical experience at some other medical campus, as had their predecessors in the Master of Medical Science program. They will be joined, this August, by 48 other students (principally from Brown, but also from a number of other so-called two-year medical schools). This inaugural class of 60 students will graduate in June, 1975.

The core clerkship to be required of every M.D.

degree candidate consists of 56 weeks subdivided as follows: Medicine and related specialties, 12 weeks; Surgery and related specialties, 12 weeks; Human growth and development (including obstetrics and pediatrics), 10 weeks; Psychiatry, 6 weeks; Community medicine, 4 weeks; Clinical clerkship (selected by student), 12 weeks.

These mandatory clerkships must be taken at hospitals affiliated with Brown University. Subject to certain logistic constraints, students will be free to choose the location and sequence of their clerkships.

One-fourth of the total academic time in the last two years of the medical program has been set aside for medical students to involve themselves in productive activities other than the required clerkship experiences. For some students this may mean a resumption of personal research, for others, a return to classroom participation in the basic life sciences or humanities; and for still others, an opportunity for hospital-based specialty training.

STANLEY M. ARONSON, M.D.
Dean of Medical Affairs

This Message from the Dean appeared in the March 1973 edition of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal*.

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," he 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 Dr. 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 MD degree that spring. Dr. 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 its benefactor. The location moved off-campus in August 2011 to the jewelry district in Providence.

In December 1998, after serving 10 years as Editor-in-Chief of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* (RIMJ), Dr. Aronson retired from that position. The staff, without his knowledge, contacted several of Dr. 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 Dr. 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 humane of the sciences," noted **Jonathan Gell, MD,'75**.

Today, in its 50th year, the medical school continues to flourish and grow, like the Tree of Hippocrates fronting the Arnold Lab on Waterman Street (shown at left). 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. ❖

