

Meir Wetzler, MD

Razelle Kurzrock, MD¹; Zeev Estrov, MD²; Moshe Talpaz, MD³; and Hagop M. Kantarjian, MD²



Figure 1. Dr. Meir Wetzler. Photo Courtesy of Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

Meir Wetzler, MD, died on February 23, 2015 at the age of 60 years after sustaining ski injuries in Colorado on February 7, 2015. Many of us realize that the world has lost a special person who was a devoted physician, a leader in the leukemia field, and a wonderful colleague.

Dr. Wetzler was professor of medicine and chief of the Leukemia Section at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York. Dr. Wetzler moved to Roswell Park in the 1990s and rose through the ranks. He was a highly committed and compassionate physician who helped set the standards for leukemia care. He published over 200 articles in his field, with a focus on cytokines, immunotherapy, and the *BCR* gene in leukemia.

Dr. Wetzler was also an accomplished athlete, and was skilled at snowboarding, skiing, and running. He participated in Ironman triathlons, and was considered more fit than many half his age.

Born in Israel, Dr. Wetzler earned his medical degree from The Hebrew University Hadassah Medical School in Jerusalem and completed his internal medicine training at the Kaplan Medical Center in Rehovot. He completed training in medical oncology with an emphasis on biological therapy at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Razelle Kurzrock, MD, now Senior Deputy Center Director at the University of California at San Diego Moores Cancer Center, remembers him well from his time at MD Anderson Cancer Center. “He was a very dedicated investigator. While he was with us, he published several very important papers, including a study in *PNAS* [*Proceedings of the National*

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Academy of Sciences of the United States of America], one of the foremost journals, on the role of the *BCR* gene in chronic myelogenous leukemia. He also described, for the first time, a new disease entity, which we called WHIM syndrome. By 2014, the genetics of WHIM was known, and we circled back and wrote another paper on it, tying the story of this rare disorder together, 24 years after its initial publication.” However, Dr. Kurzrock notes that what she remembers best about Dr. Wetzler was his seriousness and his dedication—and that he had a distinctive voice. “Even years after he left MD Anderson, whenever we met at a conference, I was immediately struck by his unique voice. I believe that his voice will be sorely missed by many of us.”

Moshe Talpaz, MD, who is also a prominent leukemia researcher, knew Dr. Wetzler well. “It saddened me very much to learn of the tragic news,” he says. “I recruited Dr. Wetzler to MD Anderson Cancer Center and was immediately impressed with his total commitment to his work and his ability to devote very long hours to research. While working together at MD Anderson, Meir studied and published on the effect of bone marrow stromal cyto-

kines in chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML), and the molecular biology of CML. He was a prolific writer and published extensively. I was not surprised to see him become a successful investigator at Roswell Park. Dr. Wetzler and I maintained communications over the years, and his passing at the peak of his productivity has been painful to all those who knew him, including his patients.”

Zeev Estrov, MD, a professor and well-known researcher in the Department of Leukemia at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, is a long-term colleague and friend of Dr. Wetzler. He stated the following: “It still hurts and is hard to overcome. I met him at ASH [American Society of Hematology] in December, and he looked like a man in his late 30s. I knew him well from the Kaplan Hospital in Israel, as an intern and resident in the Department of Medicine C. He was an outstanding, dedicated physician who cared deeply about his patients, and did all he could to provide them with the best possible care. His parents, whom I met, were Holocaust survivors, and he was their only child.”

Dr. Wetzler is survived by his wife Chana and 4 children: Mor, Shira, Adam, and Modi.