

## Laurence A. Boxer, MD, 1940–2017



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Laurence A. Boxer, a respected and beloved figure in the pediatric hematology/oncology community, died on January 9, 2017, after many years of treatment for multiple myeloma. He had only recently retired from the University of Michigan Medical School, where he held the Henry and Mala Dorfman Family Chair in Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, a professorship established in part to recognize the extraordinary care he had provided to the Dorfman children.

Larry grew up in Denver, CO, where his parents ran a small family “mom and pop” plumbing operation. His father hoped he would enter the family business, but told him “if you cannot become a plumber, you can always become a doctor.” Larry chose the latter and attended Stanford Medical School, where he was later honored as the J. Wallace Sterling Outstanding Medical Alumnus of Stanford University. He trained as a pediatric resident at Yale University, where he met his wife, Grace Jordison Boxer, a medical hematologist with whom he has shared a lifelong devotion to family, medicine, colleagues, students, and travel.

After Vietnam-era military service at Tripler Army Hospital in Honolulu, where he started to develop his research in neutrophil biology, he pursued fellowship training in pediatric hematology/oncology at Boston Children’s Hospital, then moved to Indiana University School of Medicine, where he and Robert Baehner established a powerhouse program of phagocyte research and patient care. In 1982, he came to Ann Arbor as professor and director of the division of pediatric hematology/oncology at the University of Michigan, where he has also served as associate chair for research and then associate chair for faculty affairs.

Larry’s research focused on disorders of phagocyte number and function. His contributions include major discoveries in the pathology, molecular biology, and treatment of phagocyte disorders including Chédiak–Higashi syndrome, secondary granule deficiency, and chronic granulomatous disease, as well as fundamental investigations into the biochemistry of neutrophil phagocytosis, granule sorting, and exocytosis. His clinical research in neutropenia included the seminal clinical trial of granulocyte colony-stimulating factor (G-CSF) for severe congenital neutropenia and, through his leadership role in the Severe Chronic Neutropenia International Registry, influential investigations of the molecular basis of congenital neutropenia and the risks of myelodysplasia and myeloid leukemia in G-CSF-treated patients. His scientific accomplishments led to many awards and leadership positions in major academic societies including the Society for Pediatric Research (E. Mead Johnson Award), American Society of Pediatric Hematology Oncology (ASPHO Distinguished Career Award), American Society for Clinical Investigation, American Society of Hematology (ASH), and American Pediatric Society.

Larry was also a gifted writer and editor, who served in many other editorial positions, including associate editor of the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* and the *American Journal of Hematology*; a member of the editorial boards of *Pediatric Blood and Cancer*, *Current Opinion in Hematology*, *Hematotherapy and Stem Cell Research*, *Pediatrics in Review*, and *American Journal of Hematology*; and member or chair of the publications committees of ASPHO and ASH.

Although Larry did not follow an early inclination to be a rabbi, he became an extraordinarily devoted teacher and mentor. In fact, during one of his final hospital admissions, he interrupted a resident’s history-taking to say, “Enough about me; tell me about your research!” Junior faculty members and fellows who have trained or established their early careers under Dr. Boxer’s mentorship now lead major academic and pharmaceutical programs. Of all of the many accolades during his career, none was more important to him than the individual relationships he had with his colleagues and the countless individuals he mentored during his career. In

December, 2016, Larry was honored with the ASH Mentorship Award, acknowledging his accomplishments supporting the career development of others. Despite ill health and against all medical advice, Larry traveled to San Diego to receive this award as a coda to his career.

Our community has lost a giant in pediatric medicine, an exemplary mentor, and a dear friend. Larry Boxer's influence and impact will not be forgotten and his deep commitment to pediatric hematology and oncology will be felt for many years to come.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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