In Memoriam: George Dean Vlahides, M.D. (1924–2006)

On Monday, 18 September 2006, George Vlahides went to his office as usual and spent the day seeing patients. Also as usual, he stopped at the gym on his way home. It was one of George’s normal long days. On retiring that night, he suddenly suffered a massive stroke, and died on the following morning, at age 81.

A fellow of the Association of Clinical Scientists since 1979, George was hematologist at the Ellis Hospital in Schenectady, New York, and he lived nearby in Scotia with his wife, Chris. Still practicing hematology despite his advanced years, George was highly respected by his medical colleagues and much beloved by the community as whole (Fig. 1).

George regularly attended the meetings of the Association of Clinical Scientists, and he and Chris were enthusiastic participants in the Association’s field trips to the Bermuda Biological Station. He and Chris had close friendships with numerous members of the Association.

A native of Brooklyn, NY, George served in the Army as a medical technician during World War II. After the war he completed his undergraduate education at Columbia College in New York, and he then attended medical school at New York Medical College. George’s first contact with Ellis Hospital was as an intern in 1951-52. He returned to New York Medical College for his first year of residency in internal medicine, and then went back to Ellis for the second and third year of residency. He was Chief Resident in his third year. He then became a Fellow in Clinical Hematology at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, where he became acquainted with several members of the Association of Clinical Scientists. In recent years, he frequently reminisced about the monthly journal club meetings at the home of Dr. F. William Sunderman Sr., which were generally followed by social hours and sometimes by musicales.

Following his training, George returned to Ellis where he became Chief of the Hematology Section and Director of the Special Hematology Laboratory. He was also Director of the Blood Bank, Senior Attending Physician, and Director of Medical Education. He served as consultant in Hematology to several other hospitals and was Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine at Albany.
Medical College. A meticulous solo practitioner of the old school, George routinely worked late hours on his patients’ records, and would spend two to three hours “getting to know” each of his new patients. He was highly skilled in his field. “George taught me all I know about Hematology,” the Chief of Pathology at Ellis Hospital told me.

For a number of years, George had dreamed of setting up a Hematology-Oncology unit at Ellis Hospital, where patients could receive physician care, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy with a single registration. One snowy Sunday, when he drove a lady named Agnes MacDonald home from church, George mentioned his dream. Mrs. MacDonald volunteered to donate the money, and the MacDonald Hematology-Oncology Unit was established at Ellis Hospital in 1980.

George always found time for exercise. In his younger years he used to run at lunchtime along the banks of the Mohawk River in Schenectady, and more recently he was in regular attendance at a local gym. He was an avid hiker and would often come to visit me and Linda at our summer house in the Adirondacks, where we would go hiking.

Besides his wife, the former Christine Martinec, he is survived by John and Barbara, his son and daughter from a previous marriage, and by his brother, Anthony. Another son, George Dean Jr., died in 1981. A George Dean Vlahides Scholarship Fund has been established at Ellis Hospital in George’s memory. Fellows of the Association who wish to contribute may send a donation to the Ellis Hospital Foundation, George Dean Vlahides Scholarship Fund, 1101 PO Box 1015, Schenectady, NY, 12301-1015, USA.

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