

In Memoriam

Ezra M. Greenspan, M.D.



Dr. Ezra Greenspan, Emeritus Clinical Professor of Medicine, died on September 3, 2004, after a long illness. He is survived by his wife Edith, his 3 children and 3 grandchildren. He was famed world-wide for publishing the first studies of combination chemotherapy for ovarian cancer in 1962 and for metastatic breast cancer in 1963.

After graduating from Cornell University in 1940, and New York University College of Medicine in 1943, he spent his entire professional career, except for military service, at Mount Sinai. His World War II assignment was in the U.S. Public Health Service, working for the National Cancer Institute in Baltimore, before the National Institutes of Health were consolidated in Bethesda.

Dr. Greenspan was a full member of the triumvirate, with Abraham Goldin and Emanuel Schoenbach, who conducted fundamental studies on aminopterin, the first drug reported to produce temporary remissions in acute leukemia of children. In 1950 and 1951, they completed important studies (including several on toxicity and combination therapies) that set the stage for treatment of human choriocarcinoma, the first human cancer cured by chemotherapy. Their pioneering research program

was a keystone in the development of cancer chemotherapy for patients.

In 1952, Dr. Greenspan returned to Mount Sinai, where he built upon his earlier research collaboration. Armed with experimental preclinical data that combination chemotherapy, developed on an empiric basis, was effective in the mouse model, he carefully applied this to patients. A famous example was the safe use of oral low-dose methotrexate (until the earliest evidence for mucositis). For many years, Ezra was a “lone warrior” at Mount Sinai, bringing hope to legions of cancer patients and extending their lives. He also offered them his encouragement and enthusiasm, supplementing the chemotherapy regimens he was developing, with his own “holistic” approach to the disease.

Because his clinical research was contrary to accepted dogma, Dr. Greenspan had to overcome great bias and resistance. His before-and-after pictures of breast cancer metastasis in the lung, showing major regression, were published in *The Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine* in 1963. They had been rejected by another major journal because the reviewer insisted that the pictures must have been reversed. He wrote extensively on his clinical experience and laid the groundwork for international trials of combination chemotherapy, which subsequently corroborated his innovative approach.

In 1968 Dr. Greenspan established The Chemotherapy Foundation, which he served as chairman and medical director. The foundation, sustained in part by his grateful patients, has supported cancer research projects in all the medical schools of New York State. Its annual meetings attract nearly 2,000 attendees from all over the world. Dr. Greenspan, with extraordinary knowledge of research in progress, served as program chairman for these scientific feasts nearly up to the end of his life. In 2003 the attendees, apprehensive about his failing health, honored Dr. Greenspan with a citation:

Ezra M. Greenspan, M.D., Consummate Oncologist

You pioneered the use of combination chemotherapy for patients with cancer. You shared your wisdom with generations of physicians over more than half a century. You educated a legion of oncologists through annual conferences on current and futuristic cancer therapies. You supported chemotherapeutic research with grants to intrepid investigators. You extended the lives of countless patients in your own practice and by your teachings in oncologic offices and clinics across the land. For your imagination, creativity, stalwart courage in the early days when you met nearly universal disbelief, for your tenacity, generosity of support, of spirit, and of self, you are held in reverential esteem. You have the thanks of those who have faced cancer as a personal challenge and of us gladiators, who have followed your leadership in waging battle.

Hail, Ezra! We, who are about to succeed because you pointed the way, salute you.

James F. Holland, M.D.
Distinguished Professor of Neoplastic Diseases
and
Samuel Waxman, M.D.
Professor of Medicine
Mount Sinai School of Medicine