



IN MEMORIAM

Nicholas A. Halasz
Professor Emeritus of Surgery
UC San Diego
1931-1999

Nicholas A. Halasz was born on March 13, 1931, in Budapest, Hungary. He received his early education in his native land, graduating with a B.A. degree from Teachers College, Budapest, before immigrating to the United States and receiving a Sc.B. degree from Trinity College in 1950. He attended medical school at Yale University, receiving his M.D. degree (cum laude) in 1954. He continued his postgraduate training in general, cardiovascular, and thoracic surgery at the same institution. After obtaining his U.S. citizenship, he served his military service from 1956 to 1958 as a captain in the U.S. Army and he functioned as a surgical officer for the 121st Evacuation Hospital in Korea at Fort Dix Army Hospital. Following completion of his surgical training at Yale, he moved to the West Coast, joining the faculty of the Department of Surgery at UCLA, in 1963, as an Assistant Professor. He was quickly promoted to Associate Professor.

In 1967, he was one of the founding faculty members of the UCSD School of Medicine, joining UCSD as Professor of Surgery and Head of the Division of Anatomy. Dr. Halasz was also the founding Director of the UCSD Transplantation Program, and he performed the first kidney transplant in San Diego. He developed one of the best human anatomy courses for medical students in the country. He received numerous awards and prizes, both as an undergraduate and postgraduate, and was a Markle Scholar in academic medicine from 1964 to 1969. He holds the record at UCSD in the Department of Surgery for receiving the Kaiser Award for Teaching Excellence in four separate years. He was also awarded the Chancellor's Associate Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1989 and was voted Physician of the Year at UCSD Medical Center in 1994.

Nick Halasz was known as a teacher and mentor for generations of house staff and medical students. An outstanding clinician, teacher, researcher, and colleague, he was a "renaissance man" in the truest sense of the term. He unselfishly served the Department and the University in multiple important roles and on countless committees. He acted as interim Department Chair and Program Director in general surgery during the period 1981-83. When he retired from full time University employment in 1994, he undertook the position of Chief of the Surgical Service at the V.A. Medical Center where his organization, leadership, ingenuity, and sense of fairness helped reorganize and rejuvenate surgical practice and teaching at that institution. His published contributions of over 170 papers covered a wide variety of general surgical topics from transplantation to trauma, hepatobiliary disease, wound healing, and gastrointestinal disorders. He was a member of virtually all the prestigious national and international surgical organizations and societies and participated in the affairs of many of them in active fashion. He served on the Editorial Board of several peer reviewed journals. He was a board member/ Director of the American Board of Surgery from 1984 – 1988 and was President of the San Diego Society of General Surgeons, California Society of Transplant Surgeons, and Western Association of Transplant Surgery.

In spite of all his achievements and contributions, Nick was a quiet, modest, and unassuming person. His dedication to surgical education was genuine. He made a lot of personal sacrifices to help others in our department. He was a true surgical scholar. He was a world traveler, knowledgeable in the arts, literature, wine, and especially surgical history. He invariably had one or more surgical vignettes to share with the department at our weekly grand rounds and mortality and morbidity conference.

Nick faced his final illness with the same calm dignity that he approached any problem. He was a model patient and was genuinely considerate to his doctors and nurses. He was at work in his office 10 days following a major thoraco- abdominal operation! Once he realized that his disease was terminal, he planned his departure with thoughtfulness, taking care of all his affairs to spare his family and friends any potential hardship or difficulty. Nick was a good family man and a loyal friend. He is survived by his wife, Diane, and by his two children, Peter and Katherine. He will be sorely missed by all of us. As a mark of posthumous recognition, the General Surgery Service at the V.A. Medical Center and the Anatomy Dissecting Room at UCSD have both been named after him.

David B. Hoyt
A.R. Moossa