



IN MEMORIAM

Mitchell P. Fink
Professor of Surgery
UC Los Angeles
1948-2015

Mitchell P. Fink, MD, one of the most inspiring and influential leaders in the field of intensive care medicine, died at age 66 on November 17th after being diagnosed this summer with an aggressive cancer. Mitch, a San Francisco native, was the only child of Walt and Betty Fink, both immigrants. Mitch was an excellent student at Redwood High School, where he lettered in tennis. He graduated from UC Davis in 1970 where he majored in chemistry and played lead guitar and harmonica in a rock band. He taught himself to play both instruments. Mitch graduated from the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis in 1976 and completed general surgery training at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland in 1981. Thereafter, he held faculty positions at the Bethesda Naval Center and the University of Massachusetts, where he worked as a surgeon and intensivist.

In 1992, he moved to the Harvard Medical School, eventually becoming the Johnson and Johnson Professor in Surgery and surgeon-in-chief at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. He moved to the University of Pittsburgh in 1999 where he subsequently became the inaugural chair of the Department of Critical Care Medicine. He founded several companies based on discoveries from his laboratory and, in 2007, left the University to oversee the formation of one of these ventures. In 2009, Mitch returned to academia, joining the faculty at University of California Los Angeles where he held the title of Professor of Surgery and Vice Chair for Critical Care. His extraordinary career began early with a first author paper in *Nature* while still in medical school. While working in Bethesda, he forged close relationships with the National Institutes of Health critical care group and conducted a number of seminal experimental studies aimed at understanding sepsis, trauma and shock syndromes.

Later, Mitch would conduct pioneering work using cell-based models of organ dysfunction to tease out the cellular response to stress from typical danger signals. In addition to his passion for experimental research, Mitch also conducted many highly cited clinical studies, co-wrote the Textbook of Critical Care, and served on the editorial boards of numerous journals, including Critical Care, Critical Care Medicine, and Intensive Care Medicine. During his career, Mitch cared for thousands of patients with skill and compassion, amassed a great body of experimental and clinical research, trained and mentored hundreds of physicians and scientists, demonstrated wonderful entrepreneurship, and carved a vision of modern multidisciplinary critical care with lasting benefits for the entire field of critical care.

For decades, academic medicine has praised the rare individual who excels as the so-called triple threat: teacher, clinician, and scientist. Mitch was all that and more, a truly visionary leader in both academia and industry. To all of his work, Mitch brought four enduring characteristics: knowledge, logic, creativity, and focus. He maintained an encyclopedic knowledge of the world, able to quote relevant papers, data and information off the top of his head from a dizzyingly wide range of art, science, politics and history. He also exercised crystal clear logic, distilling the most complex problem into a series of simple steps, whether it was a complicated piece of basic science or a tough business decision facing a start-up biotechnology company. Having concisely summarized any problem, he then brought great creativity and inventiveness to probe and tackle its solution. Finally, he always kept a clear sense of purpose, making sure neither he nor his colleagues ever lost sight of the larger goals of advancing medical knowledge and saving lives.

People who worked with Mitch came to know him as a wonderful mentor and colleague. They saw not only his intellect and drive, but also his warmth, compassion, wit, and grace. His door was always open, ready to listen to everyone from senior colleagues to junior residents and new staff. He had words of kindness and advice to coach them through every disappointment and words of praise and respect for every accomplishment. Through both his words and actions, he taught colleagues not just about medicine and science, but about life, relationships, honor, duty, and service. He was an immense presence. With Janis Wheeler Fink, Mitch had two wonderful children, Emily and Matthew, whom he loved dearly.

In 2007 Mitch re-united with his college sweetheart, Judy Rochlin, and in 2011 they married in Davis, California. Mitch and Judy were devoted to each other and shared a joyful, loving, action-packed eight years, traveling the world as well as enjoying the simple things in life. Mitch took excellent care of himself and played tennis nearly every day. Mitch is survived by his children, Matt and Em, their mother, Jan, his wife, Judy and his step daughter, Annie.