



## IN MEMORIAM

Thomas B. Leberz  
Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Emeritus  
Los Angeles  
1922 — 2002

When Tom Leberz died on January 17, 2002, the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, as well as the entire UCLA community, lost one of its most devoted and colorful members. Admired by all and truly loved by students at all levels, colleagues, patients and members of his large family, he brought joy wherever he went. His enthusiasm, insistence on complete dedication to patient care that was as near perfect as possible, as well as his exuberant nature, brought repeated expressions of great loyalty and respect. He exhibited exceptional warmth and deep concern for the welfare of residents in training. One episode that typified his behavior was an occasion when he became aware that a resident could not make the monthly payment on his home mortgage. Without fanfare or seeking participation from any other faculty member, Dr. Leberz simply made the payment himself.

He had had a long and distinguished medical career in the U.S. Navy before coming to UCLA. He had been the chief of the Obstetrical and Gynecological Service at some of the major naval hospitals including those located in Bethesda, Maryland, and in Oakland and San Diego. Early in his career he developed an interest in evaluating the efficacy of various forms of treatment for some of the major illnesses of women. He was able to gather the experience with the treatment of large numbers of women because he was very forceful and persuasive and succeeded in gaining the cooperation of physicians located at several large navy hospitals and therefore to draw meaningful conclusions regarding various treatments. One particularly important study reported the management of pregnant women who experienced rupture of the amniotic membranes before the onset of labor. This situation exposes both mother and baby to the possibility of infection of a serious nature. His publication had a major impact on the treatment of these women throughout the country.

During the time that he was located in San Diego, from 1963 to 1968, he developed a close relationship with UCLA, including having some of his residents gain experience at UCLA. He left the Navy in 1968 and after spending two years on the faculty at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine he was successfully recruited to the department at UCLA as an associate professor in 1970.

After coming to UCLA he continued his interest in research in several areas. He established a laboratory for the study of amniotic fluid. Ultimately, he was able to identify substances with antimicrobial activity in amniotic fluid. He was also a pioneer in the field of prenatal diagnosis using cells from amniotic fluid to discover genetic abnormalities. Also, in collaboration with Dr. Armand Peseyra he developed a very successful operation for the treatment of urinary incontinence in women. Their procedure was much less complicated than operations that had previously been employed for the management of this problem, and the results were excellent.

Therefore, it quickly found widespread acceptance by gynecologic surgeons. Dr. Leberz continued to modify and improve the operation after coming to UCLA and taught the procedure to many other physicians. The success of the procedure was widely reported in many standard textbooks of gynecology and female urology and peer review journals. It led to further innovations in the field of female urology. He was an excellent and intrepid surgeon and always insisted on the expeditious but careful treatment of tissue. Residents were very

grateful for his instruction and eagerly sought opportunities to operate with him. After being on the faculty at UCLA for just two years he was advanced to the rank of professor.

Dr. Lebherz welcomed other challenges. Some of the dermatological problems that affect the vulva are difficult to manage, such as establishing an accurate diagnosis and carrying out effective treatment. Rather than avoiding these difficult problems, he took an active interest in them. He established a clinic for the diagnosis and treatment of vulvar problems and taught many physicians about these matters.

Family life was very important to Dr. Lebherz. He took a very active interest in the activities and accomplishments of his seven children, and 19 grandchildren. Due to the careful supervision by the parents, each has been an unqualified success. He was very proud of each of them and regularly praised their accomplishments. He and his wife Elizabeth were a devoted couple. In spite of their many parental responsibilities, they were avid tournament bridge players and participated on a regular basis. This was the one activity that competed with Tom's overwhelming dedication and sense of responsibility to personal patient care. He was at times a bit disgruntled when called away from a bridge tournament but never remained at a tournament when a patient needed him.

He was a remarkably intelligent, energetic, outgoing, enthusiastic and dedicated faculty member and physician. At reunions, former resident physicians always sought out Tom Lebherz. When present he filled the room with humor and energy. He was the "residents' and students' friend" who had given his all to them. He will be very sorely missed, and the department will always seem a bit more subdued and filled with a sense that something is missing whenever the members gather.

William J. Dignam  
William Growdon