



IN MEMORIAM

Paul Francis Wehrle
Professor of Pediatrics, Emeritus
Irvine
1921–2004

Paul Wehrle, M.D. was a distinguished pediatrician and a pioneer in the field of pediatric infectious and communicable diseases. He gained an international reputation for his work in the epidemiology, treatment and prevention of polio and smallpox. He passed away on May 11, 2004 in San Clemente, California.

Following a distinguished career for over 25 years as chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Southern California School of Medicine, he stayed on at USC in an administrative capacity for a brief period. He then moved to the UCI School of Medicine where he served as acting chairman of the Department of Pediatrics from 1988 to 1990. He was Professor Emeritus at UCI from 1990 to 1994.

Dr. Paul Wehrle was born on December 18, 1921 in Ithaca, New York. His family moved to Tucson, Arizona where his father was a professor at the University of Arizona. Paul attended high school in Tucson from 1937 to 1940 and the University of Arizona from 1940 to 1943. He interrupted his schooling during World War II to join the Navy, where he served from 1942 to 1945. On discharge from the Navy, he entered medical school at Tulane University in New Orleans and completed his residency training in Pediatrics at University of Illinois in 1950.

He started his career in infectious disease as Assistant Medical Director at the Chicago Municipal Contagious Disease Hospital from 1950 to 1951. He then joined the University of Pittsburgh as a Research Associate in Epidemiology and at the same time served in the Epidemic Intelligence Service, Communicable Disease Center of the United States Public Health Service from 1951 to 1953. It was during this period that he was sent to Iowa by the CDC to describe the epidemiology of the poliomyelitis epidemic occurring there. This he did with great distinction, the first of many of his scientific contributions. From 1953 to 1955 he was a research associate in epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University. He reported on gamma globulin prophylaxis for the prevention of family spread during polio outbreaks. He was also involved in the early clinical trials with the Salk vaccine for the prevention of poliomyelitis.

He then moved to State University of New York in Syracuse in 1955 where he served as associate professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Microbiology until 1961. While there he continued his work with national committees, including serving on the Committee on Sterilization of Blood Products for the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences.

In 1961, Dr. Wehrle accepted the position of Hastings Professor of Pediatrics, University of Southern California Medical School and chair of the Pediatric Department based at the Los Angeles County and University of Southern California Medical Center. He was the first full time faculty member in the Pediatrics Department at the hospital with academic credentials. Over the next two decades he proceeded to build a strong academic program with key recruitments and emphasis on research which put the Department of Pediatrics on the academic map. He encouraged the development of fellowships for the increasing sub-specialization in pediatrics and founded one for infectious disease.

He was a superb clinician, epidemiologist and a pioneer in virology. In the 1960s he carried out the earliest trials of ampicillin in bacterial meningitis. One of his most important accomplishments came in 1969-1970

when he took a sabbatical year to serve with the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. As Medical Consultant to the Smallpox Eradication Unit he traveled to Africa, Nepal, India, and Afghanistan, lecturing and training local people in these areas to give vaccinations to members of their communities against the disease. During this time he also made a signal contribution to the understanding of airborne transmission of the smallpox virus, by careful epidemiologic observations in a hospital in Germany. He continued to work as a member of the WHO team in the smallpox eradication campaign and was a signatory to the WHO's official declaration that smallpox had been globally eradicated in October 26, 1979.

Dr. Wehrle belonged to at least 18 professional societies including those devoted to research, public health and epidemiology. He was a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics and served as its vice- president and later president in the late 1970s. He served on the editorial boards of four journals including the prestigious Infectious Diseases. With Dr. FH Top, Sr., he was editor of the standard reference, Communicable and Infectious Diseases. After retirement he was still working on the 10th edition.

He was jovial, good natured and was noted for his sly wit even when under pressure. One of his favorite expressions was, "These are interesting times!" his adaptation of the Chinese curse, may you live in interesting times. One of my (Hodgman) favorite expressions came from an occasion when he was presented with another plaque. He received it graciously while remarking, "Ah yes plaques, the road to senility is paved with plaques." In addition to being cheerful and outgoing, he was also frugal, some of his fellows in Infectious Disease would say to an extreme. A hobby that he shared with his sons was the repair of antique automobiles, which he drove regularly to and from work. Paul Wehrle leaves behind his wife of 59 years, Beth; and four sons. The youngest and the oldest both became physicians, following in their father's footsteps.

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