



IN MEMORIAM

Herbert Weiner, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1921– 2002

Herb Weiner was a “physicians’ physician,” a man with an extraordinary capacity for insight into the workings of the human mind and body. Herb always believed that a psychiatrist was, first and foremost, a physician – a philosophy that he shared with legions of students over his more than 50 year medical career. He continually emphasized the importance of understanding the effect of physical illnesses on brain function, and of mental illness on the health of the human organism. Herb was a pioneer in shaping our thinking of the intertwined nature of mind and body, and his early insights enabled him to make seminal contributions in the area of mind- body medicine.

We now recognize the fallacy of Cartesian dualism and accept the tenet that mind and body are intimately connected. At the time when Herb laid the foundations for this field in the 1950s, the connections were both tenuous and controversial. Through his groundbreaking investigations of the role of psychological processes on illness, Herb was among the first to demonstrate that stress affected the development of gastric ulcers. He later conducted research on the effects of behavior on bronchial asthma and rheumatoid arthritis, as well as other illnesses. In the 1970s, Herb was among the first researchers to report on the behavioral effects of corticosteroids that commonly were used to treat auto- immune disorders such as asthma.

It is difficult to identify an area of psychiatric research with which Herb was unfamiliar and to which he did not contribute. He wrote on topics from anorexia nervosa to Alzheimer’s disease. He utilized techniques ranging from electroencephalography to molecular biology. He was involved in studies on stress and immunity showing how grieving over spouses who died of lung cancer impaired the immune systems of surviving wives. His research contributed to the development of psychoneuroimmunology, which examines the influence of the brain on the immune system and in which UCLA is an international leader.

He was the author of two books, *Psychobiology and Human Disease* (1977) and *Perturbing the Organism: The Biology of Stressful Experience* (1992), and he co- wrote or edited 20 others. In addition to his hundreds of research papers and chapters, he was the editor of *Psychosomatic Medicine*, the leading journal in mind- body medicine, from 1972 to 1982.

Herb was born in Vienna in 1921 and grew up in London. He came to the United States in 1939, graduating from Harvard College in 1943 and earning his medical degree from Columbia University in 1946. During his subsequent medical career, he particularly prided himself on his accomplishments with “young people,” the numerous students whom he trained. During his tenure at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, he began a training program that produced many of the leaders of American psychiatry. From 1969 to 1982, he headed the psychiatry department at Montefiore Hospital and Medical Center in Bronx, N.Y., which became renowned as an institution for development of young academicians. In 1982 he and his wife Dora joined the faculty at UCLA, where he became chief of behavioral medicine. The federally- funded training program that he established here continues now in its 17th year.

He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Dora, a professor of medical humanities and history at UCLA; three sons, Tim of Mexico City, Richard of Brussels and Tony of Arlington, Mass.; seven grandchildren; and a sister, Mary Black, of Beaufort, S.C.

Much is made in medical schools of the “triple threat” – the academic who makes significant impact as a researcher, teacher, and clinician. It is said that these days, the triple threat is an anachronism, because no one has the time to contribute on all these fronts. In fact, time is not the essential ingredient; it is the unusual combination of intellectual rigor, dedication to students, and compassion as a physician that always has made for the triple threat. This combination of characteristics always has been in short supply, and never was more admirably admixed than in Herb Weiner. He was equally at home in the laboratory, in the classroom, or at the bedside of a dying patient. We shall not soon see his like pass this way again.

Andrew Leuchter