



William T. Shearer MD, PhD in Memoriam

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On October 9, 2018, the clinical immunology community lost a humble giant with the passing of William T. Shearer, MD, PhD. Bill, as he was known to his many friends and colleagues, had been a Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor College

of Medicine and Texas Children’s Hospital for the past 40 years. He started his career in science obtaining a PhD in biochemistry at Wayne State University but then decided to pursue a career as a physician and matriculated at Washington University School of Medicine where he stayed on to complete his pediatric residency and allergy immunology fellowship. He quickly moved up the academic ladder achieving full professor at Washington University in 1978, the same year he was recruited to Texas Children’s Hospital to head the newly formed Section of Allergy and Immunology.

As is well recognized, Bill’s illustrious career in clinical immunology and primary immune deficiency became widely known when he moved to Texas Children’s Hospital and assumed the role of primary physician for David Vetter, the patient with X-linked SCID often referred to as the “boy in the bubble.” His commitment to caring for and connecting with David remains a model for all physicians to emulate. Bill recognized the incredible challenges that this situation brought to David and to his family. He developed a true bond with David and was viewed as his “hospital father” by the family. When haploidentical bone marrow transplantation became a clinical option, the decision was made in 1983 to attempt this curative therapy using David’s sister as the donor. Engraftment was achieved but sadly David developed a monoclonal lymphoproliferative process that ultimately took his life. Bill’s commitment to David did not end with the tragic outcome and ultimately, he along with colleagues identified EBV as the culprit in the fatal lymphoproliferative process. This critical observation helped to mitigate against this complication in future transplant patients. Bill consistently acknowledged that his experience with David had a lifelong impact on him and he often shed tears when discussing David at any length. At the 2015 CIS Annual Meeting in Houston, Bill shared the stage in a special session with David’s mother, Carol Ann Demaret. Here he recounted his experience with David for the broadly assembled clinical immunology community and described in detail what David taught the world both scientifically and as a humanistic spirit. While describing who David was to the world and his journey, Bill became overwhelmed with emotion when describing how

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“David passed from this world” and had to pause. At this point, Carol Ann completed the presentation of the slide; Bill then thanked her and carried forward for the benefit of those assembled. The full presentation of the account including Bill’s personal impressions of David is archived and available for viewing at <https://cis.confex.com/cis/2015/videogateway.cgi/id/512?recordingid=512>. Bill’s humble comments were met with a standing ovation that lasted over 30 s and certainly changed the perspectives of all present.

In order to appropriately care for David and others like him, Bill needed to establish the ability to monitor immunity for patients at Texas Children’s Hospital. He thus established the Clinical Immunology Laboratory at the hospital and worked tirelessly to bring cutting edge immune diagnostics to his patients. He obtained and championed the Diagnostic Laboratory Immunology added qualification, ensured compliance of the laboratory with the College of American Pathologists Laboratory Accreditation Program, and frequently served as a visiting inspector to other laboratories. Bill ensured the highest standards in diagnostic immunology for his patients and could frequently be found at the flow cytometer teaching a trainee the nuances of human immunity at the testing level. He served as the director of this laboratory until just before his passing and was a true advocate for immune diagnostics that were timely, accurate, accessible, and meaningful.

In the 1990s, Bill served on the American Board of Allergy and Immunology where all board members witnessed his intellectual zeal, depth of knowledge, and respect for colleagues. It was also during this time period that he and I (TF) both served as co-editors of the first edition of the textbook “*Clinical Immunology: Principles and Practice*” and we both continued in this role for all five editions, the last of which was published this year. Again, his intellectual rigor, editorial excellence, and amazing timeliness were demonstrated with each edition. During this time, I (TF) also had the privilege of entering into many conversations about the challenges of editing a major textbook. This was often via phone calls due to our geographic separation and this set the stage for routine voice mail messages left Sundays on my home phone by Bill calling from his office. This was my first experience with the Shearer philosophy that the work week should not to be interrupted by a weekend. Bill had an incredible work ethic that found him in his office at virtually any time of the day throughout the week and served as a reflection of his dedication to our field and the love he had for his work.

Bill typically was one of the first to step to the plate when an unmet clinical need arose in our field. This was the case when pediatric AIDS patients were first being identified and he became a major advocate for developing treatment regimens for the innocent victims of this deadly disease. Working with colleagues throughout the USA, he was a driving force in developing a pediatric AIDS network funded by

NIAID that provided break through therapies and an effective approach to prevent fetal transmission in HIV-positive mothers. The latter accomplishment has favorably impacted the world by preventing untold numbers of new pediatric AIDS cases.

Bill was an active member of the Clinical Immunology Society and rose to the presidency in 2001–2002. He consistently attended the annual meetings bringing his sharp intellect to offer insightful observations and questions that drove further discussion. Bill was a committed educator and used scientific meetings to encourage critical thinking and the development of the next generation of clinical immunologists. He was also very active in the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) including being a member of the Board of Directors and serving in other leadership roles within the AAAAI. His absolute commitment to CIS and other professional societies was another feature of his inherent nature, something that came naturally to him.

Bill served as an associate editor for the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (JACI)* from 2003 to 2015. He managed the articles submitted in clinical immunology and immune deficiency. Donald Leung, MD, PhD, the legendary editor of *JACI*, had the following words of praise for Bill:

He was truly one of the most diligent and accomplished *JACI* editors I had the privilege to work with. His reviews were done promptly, thoroughly and always with the goal of improving the work being submitted to the journal. His contributions to *JACI* were invaluable and truly advanced the impact of our journal and the allergy immunology specialty.

More recently, Bill effectively advocated for the inclusion of quality of life surveys for immune deficiency patients who had undergone a bone marrow transplant being entered in the various protocols that are a part of the NIAID-sponsored Primary Immune Deficiency Treatment Consortium (PIDTC). Just another example of his instinctive interest in insuring that we fully investigate and understand the impact of current treatment practices for patients with SCID and other primary immune deficiencies. Bill was at his core, a caring and compassionate pediatrician whose concerns extended to all patients affected by an immune deficiency.

Another side of Bill that many may not be aware of was his generosity. He and his wife, Lynn Des Prez, sponsored the William T. Shearer and Lynn Des Prez Lectureship: Investing Together in Our Future sponsored through the Foundation of the AAAAI. These Foundation funds are used annually to support young faculty development grants to meritorious applicants that help insure the academic success of junior faculty and the future of academic allergy and immunology.

Bill was confronted with a new challenge over the past few years, a progressive illness that increasingly limited his physical activities but had no impact on his intellect. He addressed this with the same tenacity that he brought to all other challenges and dealt with this incredibly difficult circumstance with grace and

courage. It was also during this time that his wife Lynn provided him with extraordinary support to sustain and assist him so he could continue the infamous “Shearer” work schedule.

Bill received numerous awards during his distinguished career including election to the American Society for Clinical Investigation, the Distinguished Teacher Award from Baylor College of Medicine, the Special Recognition Award, and the Presidential Award from the AAAAI as well as the Arnold J. Rudolf—Baylor Pediatric Award for Lifetime Excellence in Teaching. His scientific and clinical pursuits are documented by more than 320 publications listed in PubMed and more than 80 book chapters. Bill also had the true distinction of being continuously funded by the NIH for 40 years.

In closing, Bill was the ideal model of a physician scientist who throughout his career maintained the highest standards in

all his professional pursuits, enthusiastically supported his mentees and faculty, and never forgot to stand up for his patients. We are confident that his legacy will live on with the numerous physicians who were trained and positively influenced by this humble giant in our field. As his friends and colleagues, we will miss his sage advice, intense devotion, mild manner, legendary kindness, genuine warmth, and most of all his wonderful friendship.

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CIS President 2004-2005

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CIS President 2016-2017