Edgar Haber, MD
Innovative Scientist, Mentor, and Leader in Cardiovascular Medicine

Edgar Haber, Blout Professor of Biological Sciences at the Harvard School of Public Health, died of multiple myeloma on October 13, 1997, at the age of 65 years. At the time of his death, Dr Haber was the director of the Division of Biological Sciences at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Dr Haber's contributions to cardiovascular research were substantial, and he will be missed by scientists and physician-scholars throughout the world. He was born in Berlin, Germany. He obtained an AB degree from Columbia College and an MD degree from the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. His training in internal medicine was at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. He served as an Associate at the National Heart Institute in the laboratory of cellular physiology in Bethesda, Md. His mentor at the NIH was Professor Christian Anfinsen, who later won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Subsequently, he was an Honorary Clinical Assistant in the Cardiac Department at St George's Hospital in London, England.

Dr Haber began his faculty career as an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital in 1963. Within 8 years, he had been promoted to professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. From 1964 to 1988, he served as the chief of the Cardiac Unit at Massachusetts General Hospital. He was only the third chief of this distinguished cardiac program up to that time, following in the footsteps of Dr Paul Dudley White and Dr Edward Bland. While at the Harvard Medical School, he was named Higgins Professor of Medicine, director of the MD/PhD Program, and physician at Massachusetts General Hospital.

His contributions to cardiovascular medicine while he served as chief at Massachusetts General Hospital were primarily in two areas: first, a pioneering series of innovative and important research contributions on specific antibodies in the recognition and treatment of various cardiovascular disorders; and second, his important contributions to the development of the fundamental understanding of the biological regulation of the renin-angiotensin system and sensitive measurements of its component parts. With Dr Robert Lefkowitz, he also contributed to the initial measurement and characterization of β-adrenergic receptors in the heart, and with Dr Thomas Smith, to the development of sensitive and specific radioimmunoassays for cardiac glycosides. At the time of his death, Dr Haber had published 557 manuscripts.

During the 24 years that he served as chief at Massachusetts General Hospital, Dr Haber developed an outstanding cardiac unit and trained many leaders in American and worldwide cardiology. Among his many trainees were Drs Charles Francis, Thomas W. Smith, Lewis (Rusty) Williams, Robert Lefkowitz, R.M. Zusman, Kenneth Shine, Adolph Hutter, Peter Block, George Beller, Herman Gold, William Dec, Bill Carlson, Mark Estes, Jeremy Ruskin, Sanjay Kaul, Pat O’Gara, Doug Mann, Guy Reed, John DiMarco, Dean Ornish, Steve Osterly, Bob Johnson, Munen Lee, Shaun Coughlin, Ward Casscells, John Kastor, Mark Fishman, Myron Weisfeldt, William John Powell, George Thibault, Marschall Runge, V.P. Butler, Paul Armstrong, Douglas Chamberlain, Robert Leinbach, Richard Re, Victor Dzau, Charles Homcy, Eve Slater, Kim Eagle, Tom Quertermous, Suzanne Oparil, Christoph Bode, B.A. Khaw, Robert Cody, Igor Palacios, Gerald Pohost, Christine Seidman, and myself.

In 1988, Dr Haber left Massachusetts General Hospital to become president of the Squibb Institute for Medical Research in Princeton, NJ, and 2 years later was appointed president of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceutical Research Institute. In 1991, he returned to Harvard as the director of the Center for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease at the Harvard School of Public Health. There, he led 37 scientists in a molecular approach directed at identifying the genes that have an important role in the development of arteriosclerosis. As part of his own research effort, he and his colleagues also developed an experimental murine model that allowed the elucidation of the immune mechanisms that contribute to transplant vasculopathy. His research work immediately before his death had provided substantial insight into the immuno-

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logical alterations involved in the development of transplant vasculopathy.

It is no exaggeration to say that Edgar Haber was a giant in the field of cardiovascular medicine. He was an outstanding mentor, he was a creative builder, he was a brilliant scientist, and he was a fine clinical cardiologist. When he spoke, everybody listened. He was thoughtful, incisive, critical, and articulate, and his insight quickly reached the central core of any issue. One approached him with some forethought and preparation. Sometimes while listening to others, he would appear to be distant or even almost asleep, and then, as he responded in a rapid and insightful manner, one would quickly be reminded that he had heard and considered every word that had been said.

He was a very private man. His inimitable style, his intellectual capacity, and his sometimes unorthodox approach to his work intimidated some, but he was deeply respected and admired by those with whom he worked and those whom he trained.

He wanted to do special things in his research. He said to me on several occasions, “I do not wish to do anything that others have done before. I want my work to be unique and different in its insight. It is a waste of time to do anything less.”

As one got to know him personally, one found in this private and distinguished man a wonderful sense of humor, a warmth and genuine affection for others, a deep commitment to research and teaching in cardiovascular medicine, a profound love of his family, and a free and daring spirit that unabashedly ventured into any problem that attracted him with imagination and innovation. He was multitalented and had many interests outside of medicine. Indeed, his knowledge of wine, music, restaurants, and current events dazzled and impressed others.

For his trainees, he was always available and never too busy. He helped me in too many ways to mention with his advice, encouragement, letters of support, periodic suggestions, and sometimes even personal competition. The standard of excellence that he set for himself and others was extremely high, but his own style, accomplishments, and encouragement made others do their best to emulate him. Few were as successful, but he inspired all to try.

His death leaves a major void in cardiovascular research and in mentorship and leadership in American cardiovascular medicine. However, from a different position now, I know that he wishes all of us to be imaginative and innovative, to do important things, to lead and to train and to commit one’s professional life to excellence in the various areas of cardiovascular medicine in which we work. He is missed; I miss him very much.

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Edgar Haber, MD: Innovative Scientist, Mentor, and Leader in Cardiovascular Medicine
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