Remembering Benjamin Franklin Trump

The scientific world and particularly pathology lost one of its great leaders, experimentalists, clinicians, and teachers in the passing of Benjamin Franklin Trump on February 25, 2008. Ben grew up in Kansas, earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Missouri and received his M.D. degree from the University of Kansas School of Medicine. During his medical school training, Dr. Robert Stowell encouraged him to enter academic pathology as his profession. Ben also carried out postgraduate work at the University of Washington with Dr. Earl P. Benditt. Following his service to the country in the US Army Medical Corps at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), he accepted a faculty position as Associate Professor of Pathology at Duke University. He was subsequently recruited in 1970 to the University of Maryland as Professor and Chair of the Department of Pathology in the School of Medicine. Ben remained at Maryland for the remainder of his academic career. He retired in 1998.

Ben was a man with multiple diverse interests and talents and a great enthusiasm for life and science. As a scientist, Ben was fascinated by the pathogenesis of disease and pathology. His studies into ischemic cell injury subsequent to shock and anoxia were paramount in our understanding of the timing and mechanisms behind cell death and, thus, tissue and organ-based pathology. Ben was well known for establishing the utilization of electron microscopy in pathology. He was a former editor of Toxicologic Pathology, leading the Journal from 1988 to 1995. He was also elected as an honorary member of the American College of Veterinary Pathology in 1994. Following in the footsteps of Rudolph Virchow, Ben was interested in the molecular and cellular changes that occurred in the pathology process. In later years, he concentrated on other chronic diseases, in particular, cancer, and forged a long and very fruitful collaboration with Dr. Curt Harris at the National Cancer Institute to understand further the mechanisms by which human cells handled, metabolized,
and responded to chemical carcinogens. These studies led to numerous peer-reviewed and significant publications that increased our understanding of the cancer process at the cellular and molecular level in humans. Ben was successful in combining the use of electron microscopy, immunohistology, human cell and tissue culture and computer science to advance our understanding of pathology to benefit both research and patient care. He authored over 400 scientific papers during his distinctive career. A perusal of Ben’s bibliography highlights the great diversity in his scientific interests over the years as well as the numerous individuals with whom he collaborated and those he trained.

Ben’s leadership and his ability to assemble groups of scientists to tackle important questions are well known. In a short time, he took the Department of Pathology at the University of Maryland from a small academic group to one of the largest clinical and research-based pathology departments in the country. He founded the first doctoral program in pathology at the School of Medicine for graduate students and physicians. Ben was one of the founders of the Shock Trauma Center at the University of Maryland and worked closely with Dr. R. Adams Cowley to create the Shock Trauma research program. He was a past chairman of the state’s Postmortem Examiners Commission, where he oversaw the office of Maryland’s chief medical examiner. Ben was also instrumental in establishing one of the first training programs for the Ph.D. in toxicologic pathology and developed this graduate program at the University of Maryland into one of the country’s premier programs in pathobiology. Many of its graduates have gone on to exemplary careers of their own in pathology, cell biology, and cancer research, following in Ben’s footsteps. He also set up a joint research program with the Laboratory of Human Carcinogenesis at the National Cancer Institute.

Another accomplishment, and a source of great pride, was his establishment (with his longtime colleague, Curt Harris) of the annual Aspen Cancer Conference. Ben was able to assemble many of the leaders in cancer and toxicology at this annual three-day conference; the conference continues to be a premier scientific venue. Of course, the Aspen Cancer Conference also allowed Ben to mix two of his favorite things—science and fishing. Those who knew Ben also knew of his other passions—especially fishing. This love of fishing integrated well with his scientific activities including his study of the anatomy and physiology of the fish kidney.

Ben found partnership for his life and career in his wife, colleague, and friend of nearly 32 years, Elizabeth. Survivors include his two daughters, Rebecca Trump of Brooklyn, New York, and Lisa Trump MacKenzie of Perry Hall, Maryland; a sister, Marilyn Trump Loveless of Topeka, Kansas; and a grandson.

Ben was, to many of us, a mentor and teacher. He expected his students to be inquisitive and dedicated, and to be excellent teachers in their own right. He always expected his students to succeed him in scientific success and knowledge. He was a physician, a scientist, a teacher, a fisherman, a photographer, an author, a concert pianist, and a friend to many. His energy and enthusiasm for life and science, and, of course, his friendship and mentorship will be missed by many.

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