

## MEditorial April 2010

### “In Memoriam: Mel Novegrad, M.D.”

This month's MEditorial is almost 2 weeks' late. First there was a brief vacation-- then as usual, return to my medical office busier than ever and begging the question as to whether the vacation was really worthwhile!

**Then came the news that broke a lot of hearts.** My esteemed friend and urologic colleague, **Dr. Mel Novegrad**, was on life support after a sudden catastrophic cardiac event, causing an irreversible brain injury. His family took him off the ventilator and Mel passed away on April 6, 2010.

Mel was 68--but he seemed and acted 20 years younger. Despite a history of some heart problems since his 40's, Mel seemed @ 68 very spry and as energetic as ever. He and I worked together much of the past 20 years, covering patients for each other, assisting in the operating room, and occasionally consulting over difficult cases. Mel was one of the truly nicest people I have ever met. He had a funny sense of humor and went out of his way to help those around him. He made people feel comfortable and was a pacifying influence in the operating room. He was a "can do" individual. No task was too menial; and no time for his involvement in a patient matter was inappropriate. He worked hard, some say too much so for a man of retirement age. He loved what he did and was "atop his game" to the very end.

I can recall Mel carrying a typical list of the 15-20 or so patients he was seeing at Fountain Valley Regional Hospital at a time I could commit the few I myself needed to see to memory. He generously offered to help on surgical cases where he knew, ahead of time, the reimbursement would be minimal, and his time would certainly be remunerated better if he remained in his office.

Mel was beloved by his colleagues, nurses, and patients—and so much so by his wife and two adult children. He loved Marci dearly and was a true “old-

fashioned' romantic. He had a sheepish smirk/smile whenever you greeted him. He would always start by saying, in his Brooklyn accent "Al...how's the family?" He would tell jokes and stories dating back to his halcyon days as a resident in urology @ Yale/New Haven Hospital. He could barely restrain himself, repeatedly telling the quirky story of his Yale co-resident (now a famous academic urologist), unhappy with the operating room supplies for surgery he was about to perform at a Connecticut community hospital affiliated with Yale, not accepting the apologetic plea "Doctor, we will get it right next time"; in which case, that physician then wryly retorted "Don't worry—there won't be a next time; I'm not coming back!" Mel delighted in others' accomplishments--even those perhaps a bit sordid. He was proud that one of his other Yale associates, later practicing in Virginia, was the surgeon who successfully re-attached the urological organ of John Bobbitt, maimed by his infamous wife Lorraina.

Mel was a superb clinician with common sense and a fund of medical knowledge which served his patient base well. He always took notes on events in the life of his patients so as to refer back to these--and genuinely take an interest in them as humans first, patients second. Dr. Novegrad was humble, knew his limitations, was not afraid to refer out a case to someone else--and was never arrogant. Mel was the type of physician we all (I, too) strive to be; but most will not quite get there.

I and our medical community are deeply pained by the loss of this unforgettable man.

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