

Remembering and Honoring David L. Epstein, MD

by Joel S. Schuman, MD; President, Chandler-Grant Glaucoma Society



When I was an intern, we used to talk about the days of the giants. There was a time when giants walked the earth, and those of us in glaucoma, especially in the Chandler-Grant Glaucoma Society, can certainly name the giants who were in our fields. Paul Chandler, Morton Grant, Robert Shaffer, Bernard Becker and Otto Barkan. There were others.

David L. Epstein, MD, who passed away in 2014, was a true hero in our field. The consummate clinician-scientist, Dave convinced a generation of students to study and practice glaucoma, that it is important to think about our patients, and that the problems patients presented with were relevant and worth investigating. Further, if we did not understand the patient's problem, then it is our responsibility to take that problem to the laboratory and figure out its mechanism, how to cure it, and then bring that treatment back to the clinic.

Perhaps Dave's greatest legacy is the army of clinician-scientists whom he inspired throughout his years. He loved and lived his favorite quote from Sir Francis Bacon, passed down from Paul Chandler and posted by Dave in the Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary Glaucoma service:

I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from which as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavor themselves by way of amends to be a help and ornament thereunto.

Dave summed up his philosophy succinctly and elegantly in his Weisenfeld Lecture at the 2013 Annual Meeting of ARVO. He said:

When you wake up in the morning, and when you look yourself in the mirror at night, are you proud of what you are doing? I truly believe that a lifetime of inquisitiveness in one's clinical laboratory will be a long-lasting source of ultimate satisfaction in one's career. Please maintain your passion! With patience and focus on what truly is important, meaningful success can come to you. If one focuses on what is truly important, the rest will take care of itself.