TRIBUTE

Morris Shapiro ’33, ’34 (MS): A Beloved and Respected Physician for 77 Years

When Morris Shapiro died last February, he was 102 years old and had worked as a physician for 77 years. As professor emeritus of surgery and professor of emergency medicine, Morrie was still teaching medical students a few months before his death. He was a teacher, mentor, and role model who inspired many of us at the Medical Center through his knowledge, technical excellence, and sensitivity to individual patients’ needs.

Dr. Shapiro was a surgical resident at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. On completion of his surgical training, he and the entire surgical team from Michael Reese volunteered in the Army as one of the first Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH). Morrie was the original “Hawkeye.”

In 1943, his MASH unit operated in North Africa while the Allies were fighting General Rommel. On the eve of the invasion of southern Europe, they crossed the Mediterranean and established a field hospital in Italy, where they operated on many casualties of that bloody invasion. When the German camps were liberated, they operated on released prisoners and captured enemy soldiers.

In this difficult and dangerous time, Morrie met his wife, Miriam, who was a MASH unit nurse. Morrie and Miriam returned to Morrie’s native Rochester after the war. Together they raised a family of two daughters, Donna and Barbara, and later were blessed with three grandchildren, Jessica, Kate, and Marissa.

From 1946 to 1983, Morrie cared for patients as a general surgeon, operating at Geneseo, Rochester General, and Strong Memorial hospitals, and developing a large following of patients. When he was 70 years old, having been a doctor for 45 years, he decided to stop operating. Instead, he pursued other opportunities to care for patients and to teach the next generation. He established a breast clinic to provide access for women to receive appropriate evaluations for breast cancer. He also started working on a regular basis in the emergency department at Strong Memorial Hospital.

In 1993, he became a full-time faculty member of the newly formed Department of Emergency Medicine. He and Miriam donated resources to the department that were used to create the Shapiro Conference Room and the annual Shapiro Lectureship, given by an outside speaker who presents Grand Rounds and meets with the residents. Morrie was a beloved and valued teacher and colleague in emergency medicine for over 30 years—an amazing tenure considering that he didn’t start in emergency medicine until age 70.

In addition to his professional work as a doctor, Morrie made major contributions to the Rochester community as a leader in many charitable organizations. He was proud of his role in bringing Golda Meir and Eleanor Roosevelt to Rochester to speak. He led efforts to build the Jewish Home of Rochester and to make that new facility a model of care for the elderly and chronically ill.

Morrie was blessed with a keen mind, dexterous hands, and a positive attitude toward life. He was first in his class at every school he attended, but his patients loved him not for his good grades but for his caring and compassion. He accomplished much in his lifetime, motivated by interest and enjoyment. Those of us who knew him have had our lives enriched forever.

—Joel Pasternack ’80M (MD), ’82M (Res)

Pasternack is a professor of clinical emergency medicine at Rochester.