Introducing Giants in Chest Medicine

Alfred Soffer, MD, Master FCCP

Editor’s Note: Welcome to Giants in Chest Medicine, an occasional series highlighting the accomplishments of a distinguished individual in critical care, sleep, or pulmonary medicine. A recorded interview with Dr. Soffer can be found online at journal.publications.chestnet.org

A lfred Soffer, MD, Master FCCP, served as Editor of CHEST for 25 years from 1968 to 1993 and led the American College of Chest Physicians (ACCP) as its Executive Director for 23 years from 1969 to 1992. His efforts have had a profound impact on the College and on its Journal, CHEST.

During his leadership, the College transitioned from an organization founded in 1935 by Dr. Murray Kornfeld, who was a patient with TB, to an international organization of >18,000 chest physicians—pulmonologists, cardiologists, chest surgeons, and critical care physicians—in >100 countries. The annual scientific meeting, the international meetings, and the continuing medical education courses drew physicians and scientists from multiple disciplines that treat patients with chest diseases, including pediatrics, anesthesiology, allergy, pharmacy, and hematology. The College became the international leader in cardiopulmonary education programs.

Under Dr. Soffer’s leadership, the ACCP helped to educate the public about chest diseases, and it became the international leader in the campaign to reduce the prevalence of smoking.

During his tenure, the College was one of the first medical organizations to convene expert conferences that produced evidence-based practice guidelines published in CHEST or as supplements to CHEST. These guidelines have been widely accepted and have improved the quality of care for patients with cardiopulmonary disease throughout the world.

CHEST was first published as Diseases of the Chest in 1935 under the sponsorship of the Federation of American Sanatoria. Its goal was “to be of material aid to the general practitioner in dealing with his tuberculosis patients.” In 1970, Soffer led the name change of the Journal to CHEST, and its focus to all cardiopulmonary diseases and critical care.

He introduced peer review to the Journal, and when he turned over the editorship to the late Jay Block, MD, Master FCCP, the Journal had >8,000 peer reviewers. As CHEST became the premier cardiopulmonary journal, the number of manuscripts submitted to CHEST per year increased from 300 in 1967 to 2,400 in 1993.

In addition to his positions as Editor of CHEST and Executive Director of the ACCP, he also served as editor of the Archives of Internal Medicine from 1976 until 1986.

When he retired, it took three people to replace him: Alvin Lever as Executive Director of the College and
Jay Block as Editor of CHEST. I was honored to assume his other role as editor of the Archives of Internal Medicine.

Part of Al’s success as a leader is his outgoing personality and enthusiasm. At every annual meeting of the College, he made it a point to meet with as many attendees as he could (especially the youngest attendees) and welcome them to the College. Many of the young attendees (including me) became active members of the College because of Al Soffer.

Al Soffer’s years as Executive Director of the ACCP and Editor of CHEST had a major impact on graduate medical education and the quality of care for patients with cardiopulmonary diseases throughout the United States and the world.

It is very appropriate that Al Soffer is the first to be named a “Giant in Pulmonary Medicine.” He is a giant.

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Additional information: See video interview of Dr Soffer online at: http://youtu.be/YnKft-1u2MU

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