Giants in Chest Medicine

Edward C. Rosenow III, MD, Master FCCP

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Editor's Note: This series recognizes and highlights the accomplishments of individuals who have contributed greatly to chest medicine. To listen to the interview with Dr Rosenow, go to journal.publications.chestnet.org.

The choice to become a physician was clear to young Edward C. Rosenow, III, MD, Master FCCP, as he sought to emulate his father, a prominent and altruistic internist. Dr Rosenow obtained his MD degree from The Ohio State University. He came to Mayo Clinic in 1960 to pursue his residency and has spent nearly 55 years at that hospital. When asked why he decided to spend all his professional life at one institution, he answered very simply, “I was treated like a gentleman, I enjoyed the collegiality, I was surrounded by the best mentors you could imagine, and I appreciated the Mayo culture of caring.” Over the years, he worked his way up the academic ladder to become endowed Professor of Medicine at the Mayo Clinic, the administrative ranks to serve as the chair of the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, and the rank and file of the medical community to become the president of the Mayo medical staff. During his illustrious career, he published > 170 scholarly articles, contributing > 20 book chapters and editing four books. Dr Rosenow, however, focused on four important aspects in his profession:

- Chest radiology for the pulmonologist. He made it a point to review every chest radiograph himself and to discuss his interpretation with the chest radiologists. Soon, he had amassed more chest images than the Mayo Clinic radiology teaching file! He has taken these skills and transformed them to a radiograph teaching set (with > 900 slides). He has pursued this project with a missionary zeal.

- Drug-induced lung disease. In the 1960s, Dr Rosenow came across one of the first cases of nitrofurantoin-induced pulmonary fibrosis. His case and four others were published in the New England Journal of Medicine. At about the same time, physicians started to
recognize the untoward effects of some other drugs on the lungs. Dr Rosenow decided to fill the void in knowledge that existed on this topic. For almost 50 years, he extensively researched, wrote, and lectured on lung injury from medications. He coauthored the book Drug-Induced and Iatrogenic Respiratory Diseases in 2010, which has a wide international circulation.

- Transference of knowledge and information to peers and junior colleagues. Dr Rosenow would stay up until midnight almost every day, adding cases he saw on rounds to his vast collection. As John Studdard, MD, FCCP, remarked, "Dr Rosenow was an incredible teacher, but, more importantly, he shared so humbly and unselfishly with all who have the good fortune of learning from him." Never turning away anyone coming to him asking for a lecture or a discussion on a personal or professional matter, he recalls one instance when he went to the hospital on a Sunday morning to give his lecture to an orthopedic resident who had missed it. Dr Rosenow's work in the hospital was not a profession to him—it was a way of life. In recognizing the very special role that Dr Rosenow has played as a teacher and educator, Mayo Clinic has presented him Teacher of the Year Awards on five separate occasions, the Fellows Recognition of Excellence Award in Education, the Outstanding Subspecialty Fellow Award in Teaching, Mayo Fellows Hall of Fame of Outstanding Teachers, and many others. Among the many awards he has received from various professional societies, he has the rare distinction of being conferred Mastership of two professional societies—the American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST) and the American College of Physicians.

- Promoting the culture of caring and giving. Perhaps the most admirable part of Dr Rosenow's legacy is the culture of caring and giving that he fostered in his students and colleagues. He is the quintessential role model, a kind and gentle human being, who taught by example the highest ideals and values of the profession. He strongly believed in and advocated the Platinum Rule of Medicine, “Take care of every patient like you would want a member of your family cared for.” Recognition of these qualities brought multiple accolades and honors, such as Mayo's Outstanding Role Model, Henry Plummer Distinguished Internist Award, and the naming of endowments and professorships in his honor (including Professorship in the Art of Medicine). But the one award that he cherishes most is the Karis Award (karis means “to care” in Greek). When asked to comment on the large number of awards he had won, he blushed and said, “I was only doing my job in caring for my family of colleagues and health-care workers.”

Dr Rosenow's contributions to our own CHEST are laudable. Early in his career, he was introduced to Al Soffer, MD, Master FCCP, who, as Executive Director of the organization and Editor-in-Chief of CHEST, nurtured and supported him and introduced him to the many fulfilling professional and personal attributes of college affiliation. Dr Rosenow's vision was to transform the college into a “family” of professionals who work together for the greatest good of each other and the profession. He was elected to the Board of Regents and, in 1989, the presidency of the organization. With Bart Chernow, MD, Master FCCP, he realized the importance of having a philanthropic arm of the college that would support worthy projects and went on to become the President, and then Chair, of The CHEST Foundation. He devoted himself to the college for almost 30 years. Dr Soffer remarked on Dr Rosenow's special editorial and teaching skills, describing him an authority in the discipline of pulmonary pharmacology and "above all, the ideal compassionate clinician." These qualities are beautifully exemplified in Dr Rosenow's book, The Art of Living...The Art of Medicine.

Dr Rosenow has touched hundreds of lives as a mentor, as the consummate clinician who amalgamated the art and science of medicine and who taught us all the qualities in life that really matter. One of his mentees, Udaya Prakash, MBBS, Master FCCP, summarized Dr Rosenow's qualities well, “For close to four decades, Ed has guided and mentored me. He exemplifies the best in compassion, amicability, collegiality, thoughtfulness and a caring personality in addition to possessing a superb clinical acumen, medical knowledge, a vast mental catalog of well-known scientific publications. His ability to counsel peers and friends, and voluntarism in local medical clinics for the less fortunate are some of his many wonderful attributes.”

He is a true giant in the field of chest medicine.

Suggested Readings