

IN MEMORIUM

FELIX T. RAPAPORT, MD

SEPTEMBER 27, 1929 TO APRIL 12, 2001

The world's transplantation community was greatly saddened when Felix T. Rapaport suddenly passed away during a family observance of Passover in Florida on April 12, 2001. Felix was an outstanding surgeon-scientist, humanitarian, husband and father, who was universally regarded as one of the international giants in the field of organ transplantation. His extraordinary contributions proved to be major factors in the development of organ transplantation to its current global status. His contributions were not only scientific, but blended with a genuine commitment and passion to assure the successful evolution of organ transplantation throughout the world. The latter was fostered through his 36 uninterrupted years as an elected member of The Transplantation Society's Council and his editor-in-chiefship of *Transplantation Proceedings* for almost the same period of time.

Felix's scientific contributions were monumental and included more than 500 articles in the medical literature. The magnitude of his contributions are best summarized by the following quotation from the citation delivered by Thomas Starzl, when Felix was awarded the prestigious 1998 Medawar Prize by The Transplantation Society:

"Between 1958 and 1962, Felix reported the first systematic study of skin allograft rejection in humans, which suggested the existence of tissue types in man. These studies and subsequent ones with Jean Dausset culminated in the definition of the dog (DLA) and human (HLA) leukocyte antigen systems, and defined the laws of transplantation in both species. When Dausset became co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1980 for the discovery of HLA, he remarked that equal credit should go to Rapaport.

By showing that cytoablated dogs who were reconstituted with autologous bone marrow could acquire tolerance to kidney allografts during a brief window of opportunity, Felix also predicted the tolerogenic role of stem cells. Other first time observations included the loss of cellular immunity with malignant disease, severe trauma, and burns; the genetic control and sex linkage of host resistance to thermal and radiation injury; and crossreactivity between bacterial and histocompatibility antigens."

Jean Dausset had previously also commented that he was very lucky to have met Felix, who was a true virtuoso at skin grafting. Working together, they performed hundreds of skin grafts on volunteers with striking overall results that laid the foundation of our current HLA system for organ transplantation.

Felix's long, continuous tenure on The Transplantation Society's Council was truly unique and remarkable when one considers the completely open worldwide elections of the Society. Time and again, Felix's incredible support and respect from every part of the world was demonstrated by his winning elections to every office of the Society, including its Presidency, after becoming the founding and first Western Secretary of the Society in 1966. Felix's Eastern co-Secretary was Jean Dausset, and they jointly served under the first two Society Presidents, Nobel Laureate Sir Peter Medawar and John Marquis Converse. All three of these individuals had a profound and notable influence on Felix's career. Concurrently, Felix also served as the Society's first and only Historian, keeping the Society's archives, which essentially chronicle the history of organ transplantation since 1966. Essentially every Society President came to rely on Felix's wisdom and counsel while in office.

The history of *Transplantation Proceedings* also underscored Felix's important role as an international ambassador for transplantation. Through *Transplantation Proceedings*, he established formal relationships with 24 international and regional transplantation societies throughout the world, publishing the proceedings of their respective congresses and meetings. Felix can well be remembered as being present and actively participating at most international meetings, but also as painstakingly assuring the collection of all presented manuscripts for publication. Of all the congress and meeting proceedings that he published, he appeared to be most proud of the recent 2,072 page volume of the Proceedings of the



Year 2000 International Congress of The Transplantation Society in Rome, which included Pope John Paul II's historic encyclical on organ donation and transplantation.

Felix's personal life before he became a renowned surgeon-scientist is also singularly notable. Felix was born in Munich, Germany on September 27, 1929. His early life was that of a refugee on the run. In 1936, Felix and his family were forced to move to Paris, where he became fluent in French. When France fell during World War II, the Rapaport family was now forced to leave Europe by boat, without any port of disembarkation until the Dominican Republic opened its doors. It was here that Felix became fluent in Spanish and developed a close relationship with Latin America, later becoming the champion for the development of organ transplantation in this region of the world. Felix moved to the United States in 1945, where he attended college and medical school at New York University and did his surgical residency on the New York University service at Bellevue Hospital.

At New York University, Felix also undertook a research fellowship under John Converse, who, as a mentor, had substantial influence on his scientific career. Felix's first surgical faculty position was at New York University, where he became Director of the Transplantation and Immunology Division. He moved to the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1977, where he became Director of the Transplantation Service and the Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics Testing Laboratory. In 1995, Felix was named a

Distinguished Professor of Surgery and Immunology at Stony Brook.

Felix received many honors and awards. Most important were the Medawar Prize and the decorations by President Jacques Chirac of France as *Commandeur de la Legion d'Honneur* and by President Carlos Saul Menem of Argentina with the *Orden de Mayo al Merito*. Despite these distinguished awards, Felix always regarded his greatest honor to have been the privilege he had to interact with scientists and physicians of different cultures throughout the world. His fluency in five different languages served him well in this regard. He was truly the consummate international ambassador of organ transplantation.

Felix was also a very devoted and loving husband and father to five children. He is survived by his wife Margaret and his children Max, Benjamin, Shimon, Misha, and Adalaide.

Felix Rapaport had a most remarkable career with a tremendous and lasting impact on organ transplantation. But most of all, he touched and inspired the lives of many. He will be greatly missed, but also forever remembered with love and affectionate gratitude by his patients, as well as by scientists and physicians working in the field of organ transplantation throughout the world.

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