

Professor A. Bernard Ackerman (1936-2008)

Albert Bernard Ackerman was born on November 22, 1936, in Elisabeth, New Jersey. He attended Philips Academy, located in Andover, Massachusetts. After earning an undergraduate degree from Princeton University, he received his medical degree from the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. He served his residency in dermatology at Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania and Harvard University, where he had his third year of residency in dermatology and fellowship in dermatopathology at Massachusetts General Hospital. During his residency he spent two years serving at Andrews Air Force Base.

Professor Ackerman was hired by the University of Miami in 1969 and by New York University School of Medicine in 1973. He ran the Skin and Cancer Institute at New York University, where his laboratory was one of the first to screen for Kaposi's sarcoma, a form of skin cancer that became known as an AIDS defining clinical condition in the 1980s.

He was on the faculty of Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia from 1992. He established the Ackerman Academy of Dermatopathology in New York City in 1999 to provide training in the diagnosis of skin diseases. Now the largest of the kind in the world, it is owned by Quest Diagnostics.

In 2004, Professor Ackerman endowed the A. Bernard Ackerman Endowment for the Culture of Medicine at Harvard University to encourage collaboration among the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Harvard Medical School to help foster the interdisciplinary aspects of the relationship between physicians and their patients.

Professor Ackerman was a longtime critic of the argument that sun exposure should be avoided, stating that the risk of wrinkles or squamous cell carcinoma from sun exposure needs to be balanced against the advantages of exposure to ultraviolet radiation, a position he advocated in his



book *The Sun and the "Epidemic" of Melanoma: Myth on Myth*. The New York Times reported on Dr. Ackerman's return from a trip to Israel from which he came back deeply tanned having not used any sunscreen.

Professor Ackerman insisted that the causal connection between melanoma and sun exposure was not proven and sun should be avoided to prevent skin aging, but that it would be a mistake to assume that avoiding sunlight or using sunscreens would protect an individual from melanoma.

The American Academy of Dermatology recognized Professor Ackerman in 2004 with his Master Dermatologist Award which recognizes "an Academy member who throughout the span of his or her career has made significant contributions to the specialty of dermatology" and to the leadership and education programs of the Academy.

Professor Ackerman wrote some 700 papers and 60 books and provided expert testimony at 200 trials. One of his final papers, published in the Archives of Dermatology in 2008, was entitled *An*

Inquiry into the Nature of Pigmented Lesion above Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Left Eyebrow, in which Professor Ackerman argue that the failure of Roosevelt's physicians to consider the possibility of melanoma shows the flaws in medical wisdom at the time for diagnosing such lesions.

There is almost no area in dermatohistopathology, and thus also in dermatology, in which Professor Ackerman did not leave a profound mark.

In his classic textbook *Histologic Diagnosis of Inflammatory Skin Diseases* Professor Ackerman revolutionized the way in which most dermatopathologists approach inflammatory diseases. He described nine patterns: superficial perivascular dermatitis; both superficial and deep perivascular dermatitis; nodular and diffuse dermatitis; vasculitis; intraepidermal vesicular and pustular dermatitis; subepidermal vesicular dermatitis; folliculitis

and perifolliculitis; fibrosing dermatitis and panniculitis.

On several occasions I had the opportunity and honor to talk to Professor Ackerman. On one of those occasions, after a very short discussion, we agreed that in the field of complete collagen degeneration in granuloma annulare mucin could be very well (maybe even best) recognized in a quality slide using hematoxylin-eosin staining.

Professor Ackerman, a founding figure in the field of dermatopathology who trained a generation of doctors to recognize skin disease under the microscope, died at age 72 on December 5, 2008, from heart failure at his home in Manhattan.

His physical living ended, but his vivid spirit will go on.

Professor Ivan Dobrić, MD, PhD

