

Irwin Freedberg and the Government

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I admired Irwin Freedberg very much. His friendship, which went well beyond our professional ties, was a great joy to me. I shared many of life's pleasures with him, and I could always count on Irwin as a sounding board and as a trusted advisor long before (and after) I became director of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS).

We traveled and vacationed together on several occasions. In our many long philosophical discussions we would often talk about what motivated people to do what they were doing and to be who they were. Irwin had the view that people could be categorized as either "givers" or "takers," fully acknowledging that many people would fit somewhere in between these two poles. In my view, Irwin was at one end of the spectrum — he was clearly a "giver."

Irwin's giving was evidenced in every dimension of his life: as a men-

tor, as a family man, as a scientist, as a teacher, as an organizer, as an administrator, as an editor of journals and books, as an active participant in every organization to which he belonged, and as a friend. Irwin was most proud of the fact that he was continuously funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for over 35 years; his first grant was for less than US \$15,000 per year. He was greatly appreciative of this support and was determined to give back to the NIH in any way that he could. His giving to government activities was unending and exemplary. He served as an advisor to virtually every important organization within the NIH. Irwin often said that his experience on study section gave him a wonderful perspective on the entire peer review process at the NIH and helped him to advise those seeking NIH funding.

In addition to serving on study sections, Irwin served for four

years as a member of the National Cancer Institute's Board of Scientific Counselors. This required his attending at least four intramural NIH research program reviews per year. The Board of Scientific Counselors is charged with the responsibility of critically assessing the performance of scientists working within the intramural NIH research programs. Irwin was chair of the group when it reviewed the Dermatology Branch of the National Cancer Institute and actively participated as a member of the group even when non-skin-related research programs were being reviewed.

Irwin's contributions to the creation and growth of the NIAMS were considerable and were greatly appreciated. In the mid-1980s he was a member of the National Advisory Council of our forerunner institute, the National Institute of Arthritis, Diabetes, and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, before the two institutes were split. Advisory Council members serve as major advisors to the institute director and as second-level reviewers for NIH grant applications. Irwin often talked about his experience on this council as "the good old days" when he would roll up his sleeves and fight for those applications beyond the payline that were within his realm of expertise, were of very high quality, and required special attention. I imagine that his well-articulated and knowledgeable arguments carried the day for many who are currently leaders in academic dermatology.

During my first ten years of tenure as director of the NIAMS, I called upon Irwin many times for help in dealing with NIAMS matters, both delicate and mundane. I did this in a number of ways, and he always responded enthusiastically and always did his homework. Because of his broad experience and perspective, he was considered a representative of all segments of the investigative dermatology community. This is why I asked him to chair the Workshop on the Burden of Skin Diseases in 2002 (see the Commentary by Kenneth Katz). He did this with his usual strong leadership and vigor.

I appreciate the opportunity to celebrate the life of such a wonderful friend, colleague, scientist, and mensch.



Longtime friends: Drs. Freedberg and Katz in Dr. Freedberg's office in June 2004.

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