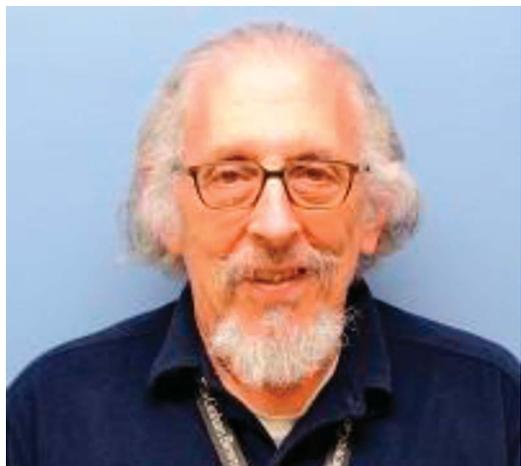


OBITUARY

Geoffrey Peter Herzig, MD

Leukemia Pioneer (1941–2013)

Leukemia (2014) 28, 1177; doi:10.1038/leu.2014.43; published online 21 March 2014



He who the Gods love dies young.
Trophonius and Agamedes, his brother

If you do bone marrow transplants and/or treat people with leukemia and you are <60 years old you may not realize how much you and the people you treat owe Geoffrey 'Jeff' Herzig. One of the first to recognize the importance of dose-intensive therapy for curing many cancers, but especially acute leukemias and lymphomas, he pioneered the development of ways to safely give such treatments. An outstanding clinician who paid great attention to detail in his care of people and his research, he decided an important way to facilitate giving high doses would be to restore normal bone marrow function by an autotransplant of a person's bone marrow. A logical and precise thinker, he first developed and then refined ways to viably freeze bone marrows. He next showed this approach worked in animals and then humans. Jeff then designed phase-I trials to determine the maximal tolerated doses of each anti-cancer drug to be used for dose-intensive therapy. These were some of the first effective therapies for advanced lymphomas. Jeff carried this interest in intensive therapy to persons with acute myeloid leukemia (AML), where he designed high-dose cytarabine studies that determined the maximum tolerated dose and schedule. His results underlie the current use of high-dose cytarabine in many types of AML and cure in over 50% of previously incurable people such as those with t(8;21). Simply put, many cancer therapies and interventions we take for granted today were designed and developed by Geoffrey Herzig.

Jeff was born in 1941, the day before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He grew up in Cincinnati and Cleveland. He attended the University of Cincinnati where he graduated with honors in chemistry and Phi Beta Kappa. He studied medicine at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland where he was inducted into Alpha Omega Alpha during his junior year, a great honor. His internship and residency were at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. Jeff trained in hematology and oncology at the US National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Bethesda and Washington University in St Louis, where he joined the faculty as Assistant Professor and Director of the Bone Marrow Transplant Program in 1975. He remained there until 1991 raising to the rank of Professor, started outstanding transplant and leukemia programs, and trained many subsequent leaders in hematology.

Jeff moved to Roswell Park Cancer Institute (RPCI) in 1991 as Chief of the Departments of Bone Marrow Transplantation and Hematologic Oncology and Professor of Medicine at the State University of New York at Buffalo. At RPCI, starting from scratch, he developed outstanding programs in transplantation and novel approaches to hematologic cancers, especially AML and lymphomas. In 2000, Geoff moved to the University of Louisville School of Medicine as Professor of Medicine, Associate Director for Clinical Affairs at the James Graham Brown Cancer Center and Co-director of the Blood and Marrow Transplant Program. He continued to develop and refine strategies to cure cancer.

Jeff was active in many professional societies and research organizations, including the American Society of Hematology (ASH), American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), International Society of Experimental Hematology (ISEH), Cancer and Acute Leukemia Group B (CALGB), International Bone Marrow Transplant Registry (IBMTR, later the Center for Blood and Marrow Transplant Research (CIBMTR)) and others.

Jeff died unexpectedly on 20 December 2013 of a myocardial infarct. He is survived by his son Andrew, his daughter-in-law Laura, his grandchildren Julia and Alexander and his brother and colleague Roger.

We, his many colleagues, friends and protégés, and the tens of thousands of people who benefited from his innovations will miss Geoffrey Herzig. A memorial will be held in Louisville.

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