

“It helps a man immensely to be a bit of a hero-worshipper, and the stories of the lives of the masters of medicine do much to stimulate our ambition and rouse our sympathies”

- Sir William Osler

I usually like to do something special for the final Departmental Acknowledgement for a calendar year. In light of the recent announcement of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the MCH CPDP for contributions to our institution, this week's acknowledgement will go to **Blair Whittemore**. Those with a good amygdala and hippocampus will recall that Blair got an acknowledgement in October 2012. That acknowledgement was written by *Harvey Guyda, Sharon Abish, David Mitchell* and *Micheline Ste-Marie* and is reprinted below as it was really quite evocative of Blair and his manifold contributions. Blair is quite simply a legend amongst us and 'legend' can be defined as "an important person known for doing something extremely well". Please join me in congratulating Blair on this award.

We have combined our efforts to submit the name of Dr. Blair Whittemore for the Department of Pediatrics weekly acknowledgement. Perhaps many in the Department have not recognized the significant impact that Blair has had at the Montreal Children's since he accepted my initial offer to come supervise the MCH Hematology laboratory. His contributions toward the Division and hospital administration, organization of patient care, teaching, and research support have been manifold, and largely unsung. To rectify this, we wish to sing his praises.

Blair initially came down the hill from the MGH in a FT (reduced load) position as of January 1, 2002. We were in the midst of a significant upheaval in the Division of Hematology-Oncology, with loss of critical staff and eventual departure of the recently hired Director (*See below*). Being friends and neighbours outside the hospital, I decided to approach Blair and ask him to help us out by taking the role of Interim Director of Hematology-Oncology at the MCH. As I recall, I picked up a choice single malt and, unannounced, knocked on his door on a Saturday evening in the spring of 2003 at 6 pm to make my pitch. After an intense hour, and half a bottle of scotch, Blair said he would think about the request/offer and that he would let me know on Monday morning. His most welcome positive response lifted a huge dark cloud and started the road to recovery of this critical Division, which is now fully staffed and thriving in all three domains of patient care, teaching and research under his superior administrative leadership. (*Harvey Guyda, Former AED MCH-MUHC*)

In order to understand the impact Blair Whittemore has had on the Division of Hematology-Oncology, one has to look at where the Division was when he arrived, where it is now, and how this transformation occurred. Back in 2000, the Division was on the cusp of collapse due to an extreme physician shortage. Crisis meetings were held on a regular basis with the administration and the morale of a once world class unit was at an all-time low. There were some hirings, which, to be politically correct, didn't work out and while those still in the Division were taking good care of patients, the Division itself had no direction and an uncertain future. While Harvey Guyda has been credited for doing a number of smart things in his life, in our opinion his true moment of epiphany occurred when he enticed Blair Whittemore from the Montreal General to guide our Division back on track as part of his "semi-retirement" (Harvey always knew the right way of putting things). According to Harvey, part of his sales-pitch involved a good bottle of Scotch (*See above*). To put it bluntly, Dr. Whittemore saved our Division.

Through his experience, diplomacy, and tactful ways, the Division has had a strong resurgence. Nurses, doctors, allied health personnel, lab technicians, and administrative personnel feel good about the Division again and reassured that at the helm, Dr. Blair

Whittemore has their back. No Division can claim a stronger advocate for the staff and their needs. He has allowed people to develop their strengths, and the Division has gone from one that was on the brink of collapse to one that has a brilliant future.

Some of the Division's accomplishments that Blair has overseen since his arrival include: re-establishment of the clinical fellowship resulting in two fellows returning in 2013 as staff (Drs. Catherine Vézina and Christine Sabapathy); the welcome addition of Adam Fleming; renovation of 8D; accreditation of the bone marrow transplant program according to international standards - the Division being recognized by the Quebec government (Lutte contre le cancer) by giving it the highest grade it can give to a centre for cancer care, 4A.

On the research front Blair has provided support to allow Dr. Nada Jabado to conduct ground-breaking research on Pediatric brain tumours and has helped in the recruitment of Dr. Kolja Eppert from Toronto who is interested in acute leukemia. Together with Dr. Janusz Rak (recipient of the Jack Cole Chair in Pediatric Oncology), the MCH is poised to become a major player in Pediatric cancer research.

Blair has provided leadership in the clinical labs, and, in his spare time, he becomes Micheline Ste-Marie when she is absent (see below). The Division and the hospital have not been the only beneficiaries of Dr. Whittemore's tenure here. Each person who has worked with him has benefitted personally. His accomplishments are the result of wisdom, common sense, respect for individuals, and a good dose of humour. He has set an enviable standard for what it means to be a leader.

(Sharon Abish, Nada Jabao, David Mitchell)

Dr. Blair Whittemore has played important roles in supporting the MCH administration. He has been Medical Examiner for complaints (2002-2006), Director of Hematology Laboratories (2002-present); and replaces me as ADPS during my absences (2002-present). These contributions reflect the following attributes:

- He acts as a sage who is always available to listen and provide excellent advice on almost any subject that concerns administrative issues or ADPS issues (he was DPS at the MGH 1989-1996);
- He is a fabulous role model and relates very well with administrative and support staff alike;
- He has a no nonsense approach to problem solving;
- He has replaced the ADPS on many occasions and has the respect of physicians and health professional across all sites;
- He can problem solve issues in the lab and has been an invaluable collaborator providing direction of hospital services in that capacity;
- He has provided counsel and wise judgment in matters involving his role as medical examiner and he has helped medical examiners that followed him gain expertise;
- La sagesse et le soutien indéfectible de son équipe dans des moments très difficiles;
- Il est un gentilhomme and homme de renaissance!

(Dr. Micheline Ste-Marie, Associate Director of Professional Services, MCH-MUHC)

I would like to add a few words to the above. One of the first things I learned as Chair beginning in November 2011 was the value of Blair. He rapidly became my "go to" guy for sage unfiltered advice. He was my repository of integrity. My simple leadership advice to any Division Director would be to learn from him how to be the most effective advocate you can be for your people and patients. He is a master.

There is a wonderful Yiddish word that so captures Blair, who ironically is has a most WASP'y exterior. It is *mensh*. It's the highest compliment in my culture one can pay to a man and quite frankly Blair deserves it.

The Departmental Acknowledgments will take a brief hiatus for the holidays and return the second week of January.

I do hope everyone is able to savour the upcoming holiday season. Use it as a time to catch up with family and friends and the people you care about. Use it to recharge your batteries. We have an exciting and eventful 2014 ahead of us where we need all hands on deck at full throttle (yes I know it's a mixed metaphor...).

Happy Holidays and all the best for the forthcoming New Year!

Michael