

## "I didn't really say everything I said" Yogi Berra

Hi Everyone,

This week's Departmental Acknowledgment goes to **Denis Daneman**, the outgoing Chair of the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Toronto and Paediatrician-in-Chief at The Hospital for Sick Kids in Toronto (btw exactly where is the Hospital for Well Kids?). This breaks new ground in our weekly Acknowledgments as Denis is someone who has never been a member of our Departmental or hospital community. But Denis gets it for a myriad of reasons: for being a national leader in Canadian child health, for being my mentor for the past 5 years, and most importantly, for being a true mensch.

The 'why now ?' catalyst is my attendance in Toronto this past Wednesday at a remarkable "love fest" (best way I can describe it) thrown for Denis by his Departmental members. It began with a well-attended symposia featuring an international array of sparkling speakers on topics dear to Denis: global health, social determinants of health, individual differences, leadership. This was followed by a dinner for 300 attendees at the Great Hall of the University (think Harry Potter meets Disney) livened by humorous and whimsical video tributes and anecdotes that brought out his enduring qualities and character as a man, clinician, administrator, leader and armchair philosopher on the human condition. Any leader would savor for years such a send-off.

I first met Denis shortly after I became Chair here. He called up, offered himself to me as a mentor and resource. What followed were emails, phone calls and twice yearly encounters at the meetings of the Pediatric Chairs of Canada. At first, I used him as a forum to ask direct questions about how to be a Chair. Trust me when I say the job does not come with a playbook and only someone who has done it, or is doing it, truly can comprehend the challenges of managing a Department filled with a myriad of highly talented intelligent often strong willed people very much focused on doing their job right. Beyond helping me to solve problems with his outsider objectivity, Denis taught me how to see the big picture. To think the long game. To think strategically. To let go of being popular and defer to trying to be right. To let go of my ego in favor of the team.

Denis has a wonderful style of leading. He does so by using narratives to illustrate points and guide decision making and progress. He leads from the front, but he can just as often lead from the back, gently nudging his people in the right direction. He is a man of integrity who can be firm and unyielding when core values are under threat. He is a wily negotiator. I have watched him and learned from him. Most importantly we have become friends. Our families come from shtetls just a few kilometers apart in Lithuania. Though his went to South Africa and mine to America at the beginning of the 20th century, it is amazing how this remote place and now lost culture (utterly and completely eviscerated in the Holocaust) shaped us from a distance. We share a love of humor and wit, of knowledge for the world, of history and philosophy, and a passion to make a difference in this world.

Raised in South Africa, a graduate of the Witwatersrand Medical School, Denis was active in the struggle against apartheid before making his way for specialty training in endocrinology at Sick Kids and the University of Pittsburgh. He has spent his entire academic career in Toronto, fashioning a world leading reputation in diabetes care as a clinical investigator. He became Chair at U of T in 2006 and has led his Department through a remarkable phase of expansion and consolidation as a world leading child health institution culminating in the dedication of the 21-story Peter Gilgan Centre for Research & Learning a few years ago. While Chair, Denis has been a particularly forceful and outspoken advocate for global child health issues and for paying greater attention to the social aspects of pediatrics. While there will always be a backdrop of a Montreal-Toronto tension that is perhaps a part of the matrix of Canada as we compete for shrinking national resources, my interactions with Denis has always been flavored by collaboration and camaraderie.

Denis steps down officially on July 1<sup>st</sup> for a well-deserved administrative leave. Please join me in wishing him all the best as he embarks on the next phase of his remarkable professional career.

Have a great weekend everyone!

Michael

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