



Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation

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ASTCT Notes

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Remembering Two Pioneers and Leaders in the Cellular Therapy Field

Dr. John Hansen, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. Died July 31, 2019.

To Dr. John Hansen, every patient was special.

“Every patient that I've known, every patient that I've helped ... every one of them is a precious experience,” Hansen said in an interview in 2018.

Hansen, 76, died peacefully at his home on July 31 after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

Hansen left a huge mark on the bone marrow transplant community, with one of his most notable contributions being the National Marrow Donor Program, now known as Be The Match. He played an integral role in understanding how to find suitable donors for each transplant patient, establishing registries of these donors and started collections of biological samples and data that have become crucial resources for countless researchers worldwide.

He also served as a clinical researcher at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle from 1977 until 2018 when he retired. There he and his team studied which combination of chemicals in a patient's immune system is required to keep their body from rejecting a marrow transplant from a donor.

“The contributions that John made in the field of hematopoietic stem cell transplantation were extraordinary,” Dr. Gary Gilliland, the president and director of the Hutchinson center, said in a statement. “His work extended transplantation on a global scale. He invigorated this idea that we all need to support each other as a community – and that we all need to come together to think about ways to treat patients who have cancers that can be cured with bone marrow transplantation. Measured in the number of human lives saved, few physician-scientists have had the impact

that he had during his lifetime and will continue to have.”

Hansen was part of Dr. E. Donnall Thomas' team when he came to the center. At the time, bone marrow transplantation was a radical and experimental treatment for leukemia and other blood diseases. While it was unknown, it was thrilling to Hansen to be part of something revolutionary.

“It was so novel. And so exciting in terms of what it represented in terms of big breakthroughs,” Hansen said in 2018.

In 1979, Hansen helped perform the first successful bone marrow transplant involving two unrelated people. The little girl who received the transplant, 10-year-old Laura Graves, ultimately died of her leukemia, but it inspired Hansen to work with her father—Dr. Robert Graves—in establishing a bone marrow registry. This soon became an international repository that contains samples and data from nearly 50,000 donor-recipient pairs.

“You can't even begin to quantify how important that resource is,” Dr. Effie Wang Petersdorf, an HLA expert whose own research has relied on the repository, told Fred Hutch in a 2018 article. “Almost every major study that has sought to answer a question related to the importance of a gene or polymorphism has leveraged that resource.”

Hansen's contributions to cellular therapy and beyond will have an impact for years to come. Colleagues said that he was an extraordinary man who stands among icons in the medical field.

“John was a scientific pioneer and a true gentleman,” said Dr. Nancy Davidson, senior vice president and director of the Hutch's Clinical Research Division and holder of its Raisbeck Endowed Chair for Collaborative Research, president and director of Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, and head of the Division of

Medical Oncology at the University of Washington School of Medicine. “Countless patients and families benefitted from his expertise and his compassion. I am grateful for his legacy to the field of stem cell transplantation and to Fred Hutch.”

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Dr. Wesley Miller, University of Minnesota College of Medicine. Died July 15, 2019.

Dr. Wesley Miller was quiet at times, but when he did speak, he was worth listening to.

“He was an excellent listener,” said Dr. John Bantle, one of Miller's close friends, and a former colleague at the University of Minnesota. “He was extremely insightful and the definition of integrity. If he got into something, he didn't do anything halfway. He did it intensively.”

Miller passed away peacefully at his home on July 15 at the age of 71 after a battle with cancer.

Miller was considered a pioneer at the University of Minnesota for his work in bone marrow and stem cell transplantation. He worked there for more than 40 years and was an early proponent of evidence-based medicine, according to the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Not only that, he transformed the way the university trains and mentors upcoming physicians, many of whom still work at there today.

Friends, family and former colleagues who knew him said his death has impacted everyone he knew.

“It was an enormous loss,” Bantle said. “He was a good friend, fun to be with and an overall great person. I feel an enormous loss.”

Miller was born and raised in Joliet, Ill. He graduated from Macalester College, St. Paul and the University of Illinois Medical School before completing his residency at the University of

Minnesota. He then joined the hematology faculty and specialized in blood disorders and marrow transplants. He also met his wife Nancy there, according to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, who was working as a junior scientist in the hematology lab. Together they had three sons.

The compassion Miller had for people shined through in his work with patients and his work with students. Dr. Phillip McGlave told the *Star Tribune* that Miller's clinical care was instrumental in the university's marrow transplant program. An advocate for evidence-based practices, Miller enjoyed learning and teaching. He also had a special bedside manner that allowed him to support patients through their transplants during a time when there was a high mortality rate for leukemia and lymphoma patients.

He also stepped up when he was selected to head the University of Minnesota's Department of Medicine in 2009. It came during a time of financial hardship, Bantle said, but he said Miller was fair and smart in his approach.

"He had a difficult challenge trying to cut expenses and make the books balance," he said. "He was extremely fair. He did his best to make sure everything was right across the board, in a way that you could see was fair."

Beyond his incredible work in the classroom and the clinic, Miller was a wonderful friend, husband and father. Bantle said he and several other physicians started a tennis club that met once a week for 25 years. They would play a few games before grabbing a beer and a burrito. Through those games, the two became fast friends and often traveled together.

It's how Bantle got to know the man behind the medicine: The man who loved fly fishing, was an accomplished furniture maker and musician who cared deeply about his wife and sons.

"At the end of his life, he had two wishes: He wanted to see his third son get married, and he wanted to meet his first grandchild," Bantle said. "He got to see both before he died."

ASTCT NEWS AND UPDATES

Join ASTCT for a Consensus Grading Webinar

Register for ASTCT's Consensus Grading Webinar, which takes place on Oct. 2 from 2:30 p.m. CT to 3:30 p.m. CT., and is hosted by Dr. Stephan Grupp and Dr. Sattva S. Neelapu. CAR T cell therapy is considered one of the most promising new treatments for patients battling relapsed and refractory leukemia, lymphoma and other forms of cancer. The assessment and grading of CRS and ICANS have varied considerably across clinical trials, academic studies, and commercial products, which has made it difficult to compare the safety and measure toxicity across all of these settings. This also has hindered the ability of researchers to develop the best strategies to manage these toxicities. Join us for a discussion of the new definitions and grading for CRS and neurotoxicity that more accurately categorize the severity of these toxicities.

For more information and to register, visit astct.org.

Pharmacy SIG and Education Committee Launched Online Enduring Case Presentations

The ASTCT Pharmacy Special Interest Group (SIG) Program Planning and Education Committee have launched the

Online Enduring Case Presentations from this year's ASTCT Pharmacists Conference. This joint venture is a benefit provided to those practicing in hematopoietic cell transplant (HCT) who are seeking continuing education, but were unable to attend the 2019 TCT Meetings of ASTCT and CIBMTR or missed the ASTCT Pharmacists Conference. If interested, please see below for more information.

Courses (FACT credit available):

- Evolving Treatment Options for AML by Dr. Lydia Benitez, PharmD, BCOP
- How I Treat Steroid-Refractory Acute GVHD by Dr. Amin Alousi, MD

The ACPE and FACT credit courses are free for those seeking FACT credit and are available here.

If you have any questions about the material presented and/or need clarification on any content or technical topic, please use the Support tab at the top of the LMS portal or email jmarino@cesynergy.com.

Registration Now Open for the TCT Meetings of ASTCT and CIBMTR

Registration is now open for the TCT Meetings of ASTCT and CIBMTR. This combined meeting is designed for investigators, clinicians, laboratory technicians, clinical research professionals, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals in the cellular therapy field. This premier event offers excellent educational opportunities and addresses some of the most timely issues in hematopoietic cell transplantation.

For more information, and to register, please visit bit.ly/TCT2020