



IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Ken Swenerton

April 18, 1946 – June 9, 2017

It is with great sadness and true sorrow that we share with you the passing of our dear friend and colleague Dr. Ken Swenerton. Ken believed, lived, and represented the true values of GOC, collegiality, collaboration, friendship, sharing (mainly fun), cultivating the new generation, and growing together. He obtained the Presidential Medal in 2006 for his immense accomplishments in the field of gynecologic oncology in Canada and his dedication to GOC and NCIC. He became instrumental in the name change of GOC in 2009, planting the seeds for the future of gynecologic oncology rather than gynecologic oncologists. He promoted the integration of medical oncologists to become full members of GOC, leading years later to the election of his dear friend, Paul Hoskins as our beloved Past-President of the Society.



“GENTLE GIANT AND GENTLEMAN”

Ken was my friend, colleague, mentor, adopted uncle to my children, big brother to my wife and so much more. It was an honour and a privilege to have been part of his life. Irreplaceable, he will always be an integral part of our lives, living on in our memories.

Professionally and physically, a gentle giant of a man. Blessed with imposing height, an impressive baritone voice, endless curiosity, boundless enthusiasm and immense kindness. He was a true pioneer: a medical oncologist specializing in the field of gynecologic cancer. He completed medical school at UBC in 1969. A fellowship year at M.D. Anderson in Developmental Therapeutics steered him into medical oncology, which he practised with consummate skill from 1974 through 2011 at the British Columbia Cancer Agency in Vancouver. He influenced the treatment of gynecological cancers at local, national and international levels. He was the first physician in Canada to use the then new drug cis-platinum in ovarian cancer. He was instrumental in the ongoing development of carbo-platinum and paclitaxel which revolutionized the field of gynecologic oncology. Early on he recognized the importance of international collaboration and clinical trials, without which we would not be where we are today. He was a key figure at the National Cancer Institute of Canada and one of the founding members of the International Gynecologic Cancer Society. Always a visionary, he very early on recognized the value to research of collecting provincial data on patients with cancer, a prelude to the modern idea of “big data”. Much can be learnt, and practice changed internationally, from the study of local outcomes. The

use of carboplatinum and paclitaxel in endometrial cancer, and radiation in low grade ovarian cancers being prime examples of his practice- changing research. The ultimate result of this was the creation of the Cheryl Brown Ovarian Cancer Outcomes unit in 2004 and then linking it to translational research via OVCARE. Because of this, his vision, BC is at the forefront of international research in ovarian cancer.

Even greater than his accomplishments as a medical oncologist was Ken the man and friend. In England, the highest accolade that can be given is to be recognized as a true “gentleman” and that is what he was. Invariably kind, ever generous and always there for you when needed. An amazing zest for life. This is what my family and I will always miss and never be able to replace. He approached his imminent death with immense dignity, amazing self-possession and awe-inspiring bravery. Never was this more clear than in his final few weeks. There was no complaining and no bemoaning his fate. Instead, as ever, his only concern was the well-being of his family and friends. Somehow he managed to maintain a sense of humour and could even joke about his coming demise. Ken has never really liked water. Although



happy to travel in boats, live by the sea and stand on his floating dock, you would never actually see him in the water. His wish was to be cremated but he didn't want his ashes to be scattered on the water as he had a fear of drowning! Would be that we could all be so brave and resolute in the face of such adversity.

On the day of his death, my wife was on our deck. She saw a shooting star head up into the sky and then stop. We would like to believe that this was Ken and that he has taken his place with the stars, where he belongs.

Goodbye Ken, Gentle Giant and Gentleman. Miss you to bits!

-Paul Hoskins

OBITUARY - DR. KENNETH DOUGLAS SWENERTON APRIL 18, 1946 – JUNE 9, 2017

In the arms of an angel. It is with a heavy heart that I share the news that Dr. Ken Swenerton died on Friday June 9, 2017. Father, husband, principled and compassionate physician, leader, teacher, mentor, advisor, colleague, friend, and true gentleman. Ken was born and raised in British Columbia. After medical school at University of British Columbia completed in 1969, he pursued an internal medicine residency at Shaughnessy and Vancouver General hospitals, and completed a year of hematology (1973-4). A fellowship year at MD Anderson in developmental therapeutics (1976-77) convinced him that Medical Oncology was his career calling. He joined the Cancer Control Agency of British Columbia (now the BC Cancer Agency) in 1974 and never looked back. Over the years he held many offices, including

founding executive member and chief negotiator for The Professional Association of Residents and Interns of BC (PARI) in 1973-4, membership on the Professional Advisory Committee, member of the BC Health Labour Relations Association (CCABC representative), President of the Clinical Staff Association (84-85), Chair of the medial oncology clinical trials committee (86-87), member of the capital fund committee, pharmacy and therapeutics committee, Hereditary Cancer Program steering committee, to name a few of many. However it was in providing clinical care that Ken excelled, where he was ever a source of insightful advice based on a deep commitment to patient care focused on the person, not the

disease. Ken cared deeply not just about his patients, but also about the well-being of all of our staff, nurses, pharmacists, clerks, aids, volunteers, social workers, technicians, trainees and doctors.

Early on Ken focused on gynecologic malignancies and was instrumental in incorporating gynecology into the fold of medical oncology. As a Canadian trailblazer, he was active in clinical trials, with leadership and development roles in key carboplatin (OV8) and paclitaxel (OV9 and OV10) trials and many others. He was a key NCIC CTG figure and founding member of International Gynecologic Cancer Society (IGCS). His publication record spanned from 1976 to 2014, an impressive 4 decades. Ken was awarded the President's Medal of the Society of Gynecologic Oncology of Canada in 2006. During brief leaves he worked as a consultant oncologist in Tanzania in 1994, and helped create the Cheryl Brown Ovarian Cancer Outcomes Unit in 2004. He retired from clinical practice in 2011. His final service and loyalty to the BCCA was as Chair of the Research Ethics Board, serving from January 2014 until his recent and final illness.

In his retirement, he spent as much time as he could at his retirement haven on Gambier Island, a place he dearly loved. He leaves behind his beloved wife Mary, son Doug, daughter Anne, grandson Max, dog Ondine, and many cherished Vancouver and Gambier friends. Richer for having you among us, Ken, we are poorer now in your absence. These few words are poor instruments with which to paint the full picture of a man. Your deep and resonating, calm and reassuring voice will echo in these halls a good while. Rest well, dear friend. You will be long and fondly remembered.

A celebration of life on Gambier Island, Ken's favourite setting, is being planned for late summer for close friends and family. Donations in Ken's name may be made to a new mental health project - Riverview Village Intentional Community Society, by sending checks to the attention of Keith Johnston, Secretary-Treasurer, 311 - 1677 Lloyd Avenue, North Vancouver, V7P 0B1. Email: info@riverviewvillage.ca. Telephone: 604-922-7153

