Morton W. Grant, MD (1915-2001)

Morton W. Grant, MD, David Glendenning Cogan Professor of Ophthalmology, Emeritus, Harvard Medical School, died November 17, 2001, at the age of 86 years. During a unique career, he became both a distinguished clinical teacher, surgeon, and director of the Glaucoma Service at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, as well as a brilliant investigator in that institution’s Howe Laboratory of Ophthalmology. During 50 years of service to the Department of Ophthalmology, he became a beloved mentor and scientific role model of a clinician-scientist for generations of residents, fellows, and young faculty.

Morton Grant’s formal education was somewhat unorthodox. The son of a physician in Lawrence, Mass, he dropped out of school for a year at the age of 13 years. He made up this time while at Harvard College, however, where he finished the 4-year Bachelor of Science’s curriculum in 3 years. The next educational stop was Harvard Medical School, and then an internship at the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Mich.

Dr Grant’s career-defining next and final move was to join the Howe Laboratory of Ophthalmology, Harvard Medical School, located at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, directed by Dr David Cogan. It was a time of war, and as a part of the national effort, the laboratory was assigned the task of finding treatments for mustard gas and other chemical injuries to the eye. Dr Grant and Dr V. Everett Kinsey teamed together for these studies that proved unsuccessful as far as developing a specific treatment, but the project gave both men valuable experience in toxicology and biochemistry.

Dr Grant never took a residency in ophthalmology. His interest in remaining in laboratory investigation was too strong. Although he worked in many different fields of research, his chief contributions were in 3 major areas: aqueous humor dynamics and the resistance to outflow in the trabecular meshwork, toxicology of the eye, and the treatment of various forms of glaucoma. Dr Grant identified the locus within the trabecular meshwork of both normal outflow resistance and the abnormal resistance to outflow in glaucoma. These efforts led to numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals as well as textbooks. The accolades, including awards and medals, for all these achievements were many and well deserved. In addition, he was much sought after for national advisory committees.

Clinically, Dr Grant was an autodidact but a brilliantly intuitive clinician-scientist. He developed great insight and experience in ophthalmology and, particularly, in the field of glaucoma. Here he found an esteemed colleague, mentor, and close friend in Dr Paul Chandler, and together they helped transform both the clinical and investigative disciplines of glaucoma. With Paul Chandler, he wrote several editions of the highly respected and practical textbook Glaucoma, which originated from a series of lectures he and Dr Chandler gave to the New England Ophthalmology Society (Lecture Notes in Glaucoma). In addition, Dr Grant wrote several editions of the encyclopedic textbook Toxicology of the Eye.

Dr Grant was not an extrovert. He was somewhat reserved, almost ascetic and self-sacrificing in his lifestyle, although he possessed a wonderful, very dry sense of humor. He was genuinely warm and supportive toward colleagues and generations of trainees who remember him with great fondness and gratitude. His selfless dedication to teaching and new knowledge enabled the successful career of several generations of ophthalmologists.

His lovely and dedicated wife, Jeannette Poirier, always a warm companion, died on December 25, 2001. They are survived by 3 children and 4 grandchildren.

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