Steven G. Kramer, MD, PhD (1941-2005)

Steven G. Kramer, MD, PhD, former Theresa M. and Wayne M. Caygill, MD, Chair in Ophthalmology at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), died of complications of diabetes on December 24, 2005. Dr Kramer was 64 years old. He spent his entire academic career on the faculty of UCSF. He joined the faculty in 1973 and 2 short years later was appointed chair of the department at the age of 36. He was the youngest chair of ophthalmology at any institution in the United States at that time. During his tenure as chair of the Department of Ophthalmology, Dr Kramer saw the number of his full-time faculty increase 4-fold. In addition, he recruited several basic scientists to join the Beckman Vision Center when it was completed in 1988. Dr Kramer’s ability as a philanthropic leader was perhaps his most noted skill and the Beckman Vision Center Building at UCSF Medical School will continue to be one of his most important legacies.

Dr Kramer was the son of Drs Paul and Maria Kramer, both practicing psychiatrists. He attended Harvard College and received his MD degree from Case Western Reserve University. At the University of Chicago he completed an ophthalmology residency and PhD training. He developed a special expertise in microsurgery and ocular pharmacology. He specialized in anterior segment disease.

Dr Kramer was a gentle and thoughtful leader. He prided himself on the belief that the glass was always half-full rather than half-empty. Even as academic medicine began to face severe financial and organizational crises, Dr Kramer continued to adhere to this philosophy. His faculty found that he was always encouraging and supportive even in what appeared to be the most dire of circumstances.

As a result of his vision and leadership the Department of Ophthalmology at UCSF now includes well-renowned educators, clinicians, and researchers in all fields of clinical ophthalmology and vision research. His passion for teaching and commitment to resident training was noteworthy. As a result, the residency program at UCSF has been and continues to be regarded as one of the foremost training programs in the United States.

The last several years of Dr Kramer’s life were complicated by many medical problems. He suffered through these with good humor and few complaints. He retired from the university in 2003. His survivors include his wife, Susan Garrett, and 6 children, Janice, Kenneth, Daniel, Susan, Ryan, and Molly. In addition there are 5 surviving grandchildren. At his retirement celebration in 2002, his grateful faculty, former residents, and friends established the Steven G. Kramer, MD, PhD, Chair of Ophthalmology to honor his long-standing, unselfish commitment to the Department of Ophthalmology and UCSF.

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