

David A. Karnofsky

March 28, 1914 — August 31, 1969

The Cornell University Medical College has lost one of its most illustrious members in the death of Dr. David A. Karnofsky on August 31, 1969. At the time of his death Dr. Karnofsky was chief of the Medical Oncology Service, Department of Medicine; head of the Division of Chemotherapy Research of Sloan-Kettering Institute; professor of medicine at Cornell University Medical Center; and physician to out-patients at The New York Hospital.

During a period of twenty-three years at Memorial Hospital, Dr. Karnofsky became a legend. His knowledge of cancer was encyclopedic. No one could present a clinical problem to him without coming away with some suggestion for the patient's benefit. He was legendary to the many men who trained under him for his uncanny ability to size up a patient's problem as well as to bring to light what might be done for the patient.

What motivated him were pure elements of human character: devotion to principle, self-denial, compassion for the sick, an unfailing sense of duty, and a love for the work he devoted his life to and for the place in which he worked. Nothing he ever did even faintly suggested self-promotion; all that he did was for others. These qualities, plus a high degree of intelligence, a wonderful sense of humor, and enormous perception and sensitivity to all things about him made him truly one of the greatest of all physicians that Memorial Hospital has been privileged to have carry forward its noble undertaking.

Many men inspire by their example of character but count for little in the way of other accomplishments in life. Not so for Dr. Karnofsky. He not only inspired others by his character but his accomplishments had vast substance and impact on American medicine. He, more than any one individual, was responsible for having established the clinical discipline known as medical oncology. By establishing this discipline upon sound principles and objective observations, he made it respected by the medical community and was responsible for attracting many men to the field. In addition, his many original observations in the field of cancer chemotherapy helped form the basis on which a wide variety of chemical agents are used clinically today.

For this unique man we will always have love and affection. The world was enriched by his life as were all of us who were privileged to be his colleagues.

Dr. Karnofsky is survived by his wife and four children.

W. P. Laird Myers, M.D.