

My mentor

Guerilla rounds:

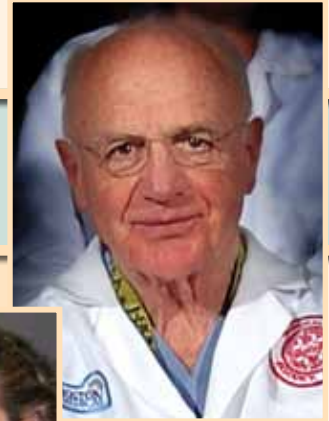
In memory of Erwin F. Hirsch, MD, FACS

by *Anathea Powell, MD*

Only a few weeks after graduating from the Boston EMS Academy as an emergency medical technician (EMT), my truck responded to a working fire in the southern part of the city. Flames poured from the upper level of the house and the noise was overwhelming, with screaming and rushing sounds of fire and water. We took two of the most badly burned patients and made our way to Boston City Hospital (BCH) as quickly as possible. Erwin Hirsch, MD, the director of the BCH trauma service, met us at the trauma doors. Unfazed and commanding, he directed the patients into the trauma rooms and oversaw the resuscitation efforts. As a naïve and inexperienced EMT shaken by the anguish of the fire, to me, he seemed larger than life during those moments, a reassuring presence that medicine could help the suffering.

Almost five years later to the day, I arrived on the surgical floor at the old BCH, now the Harrison Avenue campus of Boston Medical Center, in the short white coat of a Boston University medical student. Dr. Hirsch was no different than I remembered from the ambulance; he still suffered no fools and his priorities remained patient care and education. Dr. Hirsch reminded us at every opportunity that BCH offered the highest standard of care and that all patients who came there, no matter their socioeconomic status, should be given that care. His intensive care unit (ICU) rounds were legendary for the fear they inspired; no resident dared be unprepared for “guerilla rounds.” Past an age when most attendings would be thinking of retiring, Dr. Hirsch was not only still actively working, he was still taking frequent trauma call. He was notorious for roaming the halls at odd hours while on call, and we always knew he was nearby if we needed him.

As gruff and “guerilla” as he could be, the other side of his devotion to medicine was his devotion to the people in his life and those of the hospital. At the wedding of one of his former residents, he beamed with pride when he saw



Dr. Hirsch



Dr. Powell

her so happy. When a Boston EMS member was admitted to the hospital, he personally watched over the care and fiercely protected the member’s privacy. And on most of the nights he took call, he could be found in the ICU break room, counseling chief residents on their career plans.

As a student, I simply thought of these things as “Dr. Hirsch-isms”; now, during surgical residency, these lessons of professionalism, lifelong learning, and compassion keep me both grounded and vigilant. Eleven years after I met him in the parking lot of BCH, he remains larger than life in memory. Dr. Hirsch—husband, father, Viet Nam veteran, Naval officer, surgeon, and mentor to countless doctors, nurses, EMTs, and paramedics—died in a boating accident on May 23, 2008.

BCH, and those of us he trained, will never be the same. Ω

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