

## Obituary

**Merrill J. Egorin:  
In Memoriam (1948–2010)**

Jennifer R. Grandis



The cancer research community lost a treasured member when Dr. Merrill J. Egorin succumbed to multiple myeloma on August 7, 2010. Dr. Egorin was a charismatic individual who dedicated his career to the mentoring of young scientists. He focused his laboratory investigations on preclinical and clinical pharmacology studies designed to improve the development and use of anticancer agents. Recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the field of pharmacokinetics, Dr. Egorin received the AACR–Joseph H. Burchenal Clinical Research Award in 2006. At the award ceremony, it was noted that “Dr. Egorin's passion, dedication, and energy for definitive clinical pharmacology on emerging drugs are unparalleled. Dr. Egorin's studies have often set a new paradigm for the use of an agent based on the peculiarities of its pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, and toxicity profile.” A longtime member of the AACR, Dr. Egorin served on the Clinical Research Committee (2004–2005), as a longstanding faculty member at the AACR/ASCO Methods in Clinical Cancer Research Workshop, and as an Editorial Board Member of *Clinical Cancer Research* (1996–1998, 2003–present).

Dr. Egorin was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1948. He attended Baltimore City Schools where he met his wife, Karen Kantor Egorin. He received his undergraduate and medical degrees from the Johns Hopkins University, where he also completed his training in internal medicine on the Osler Housestaff. He subsequently joined the Baltimore Cancer Research Center, then part of the National Cancer Institute (NCI). In 1981, he was appointed staff physician at the University of Maryland Hospital, where he rose to the position of professor of medicine, pharmacology and

experimental therapeutics, and oncology. Dr. Egorin was recruited to the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute in 1998 to lead its program in molecular therapeutics and drug discovery. He was enormously productive, co-authoring more than 300 peer-reviewed publications, in addition to numerous book chapters and invited reviews. Dr. Egorin served as the editor-in-chief of the journal *Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology*. At the time of his death, he was the principal investigator on several grants, including a U01 titled, “Early Clinical Trials of Anti-Cancer Agents with Phase I Emphasis,” and an N01 titled “Preclinical Pharmacological Studies of Antitumor Agents and Other Therapeutic Agents” from the NCI. In addition, in 2009, he was the sole recipient of the prestigious five-year ASCO Translational Research Professorship for his work in improving cancer therapy and supporting the next generation of clinical investigators.

Dr. Egorin and his wife, Karen, celebrated their 41st wedding anniversary the day before he died. He was the proud father of Noah (of Arlington, VA) and Melanie (of Frankfurt, Germany). He exuded tremendous joy when he described their athletic, professional, and personal accomplishments. He was grateful that they both found partners, married, and had children (two each), thereby enabling him to experience the pleasures of being a grandfather. There were few boundaries between his biological and professional families. Dr. Egorin readily embraced colleagues and trainees, inviting them to join him in his love of sports (the ever-losing Pittsburgh Pirates, the Baltimore Orioles, and the Hopkins Blue Jays); the arts; locally brewed beers (frequently wagering cases of Iron City beer with colleagues); and rock and roll (Little Feet and the Grateful Dead were among his favorite bands). One never left his office at the cancer center without being offered a lollipop or a toy, or hearing a story about his wife, children, and grandchildren.

Dr. Egorin actively promoted the careers of his mentorees when interacting with colleagues at other institutions. “Let me introduce you to my colleague from Pittsburgh; he is a

Published OnlineFirst 10/19/2010.

**Author's Affiliation:** University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

doi: 10.1158/1078-0432.CCR-10-2528

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star and you need to know him." Every Friday, he would sport his Osler tie, and he truly followed the teaching, "Let every student have full recognition for his work. Never hide the work of others under your own name. Should your assistant make an important observation, let him publish it. Through your students and your disciples will come your greatest honor." Dr Egorin's sincere and persistent championing of his trainees propelled their careers and fostered a network of excellent physician scientists. He delighted in their accomplishments, presentations, and collaborations.

His enthusiasm for mentoring was reflected by his welcoming of students from all over the world to rotate in his laboratory. In addition to learning experimental techniques, attending weekly programmatic meetings, and observing patient interactions, Friday afternoons were spent making ice cream with fruit from local farmers'

markets, and Tuesdays were movie days. Dr. Egorin carefully selected the films for the young trainees from other countries to reflect both issues pertinent to medicine and science and iconic American culture. Favorites included *Animal House*, *Office Space*, *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, *Something the Lord Made*, and *The Tuskegee Airmen*.

Merrill J. Egorin was a uniquely talented educator, investigator, clinician, and friend. We are deeply grateful that he lived among us, embraced the world of cancer research, and gave so freely of himself, even as he suffered with an ultimately incurable malignancy. He would want each of us to "keep on trucking" and work together to eliminate cancer. It is only fitting that he requested that at the time of his death, donations be used to support a fund for summer students so that young people could continue to be exposed to cancer research.

# Clinical Cancer Research

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*Clin Cancer Res* 2010;16:5362-5363. Published OnlineFirst October 19, 2010.

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