

Sheldon Jacobson, MD

1938-2009



Sheldon Jacobson, MD, EMERGENCY MEDICINE's longest-serving board member, editor of this journal's "Errors in Emergency Practice" column since 1978, and chairman of emergency medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City, died on June 30 after a brief illness.

Shelly's lifetime "stats" in emergency medicine are off the scoreboard. Originally trained in internal medicine and gastroenterology, Shelly saw a desperate need for competent emergency care in the early 1970s and over the next four decades started the first paramedic training program (1974) and the first emergency medicine residency (1975) in New York, as well as one of the nation's first nurse practitioner programs to ensure continuity of care after an ED visit. Shelly established three departments of emergency medicine: at Albert Einstein/Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, and Mount Sinai. More than 30 of the paramedics Shelly trained are now physicians, and physicians and medical students who worked with him in the mid-1970s went on to direct or chair most of the academic departments of emergency medicine in or near New York City.

But Shelly's true legacy will be the hundreds of thousands of patients whose lives he helped save

and whose care he improved, along with the thousands of students, residents, and attendings he taught. E-mail messages from all over the country reacting to the death of "Dr. J" provided evidence of just how many lives Shelly touched and how many other EM programs he helped establish through his advice and counsel. Terms that appeared repeatedly were *kind, gracious, compassionate, warm, humble, pioneer, mentor, role model, educator, innovator*, and "*mensch*." Shelly was all of these and more.

Everyone seems to have at least one favorite Shelly Jacobson story. One of mine involves my first encounter with heatstroke, during the summer of my internship at Jacobi Hospital in 1973, when New York City was experiencing a late-summer heat wave. None of the many nursing homes surrounding Jacobi had air-conditioning, and many of the elderly residents were on medications that interfered with their bodies' tenuous ability to dissipate heat. On the third morning of the heat wave, an elderly resident whose temperature was 106°F (or higher) was brought to the ED, followed by another and another, until there were 12.

The ED had a tub room that could be used for patients with heatstroke who required rapid cooling in ice water. The only other enclosure available for heatstroke

victims was one plastic backyard "kiddie pool." So after the second heatstroke victim arrived, we had ice and an increasing number of critically ill patients, but we couldn't figure out how to put the two together. A young and very creative director, Sheldon Jacobson, MD, stood in the center of the ED and loudly instructed us to lift up the side rails of the stretchers, pull out the ends of the sheets, drape them over the side rails, and pack our heatstroke patients in ice. When one of us foolishly asked what to do about the water dripping on the floor, Shelly calmly replied, "Have you ever heard of a mop?"

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At the end of the day, 11 patients survived a condition that would have otherwise been lethal, and only one succumbed to her underlying illness. There were also 12 puddles of water on the floor and one intern who began to think very seriously that the "ER" might be a really interesting place to practice medicine....

For those of us who knew and loved Sheldon Jacobson, emergency medicine can never be the same without him. For everyone else, it will always be so much better because of him. □