

IN PRAISE OF EXTRAVAGANCE...

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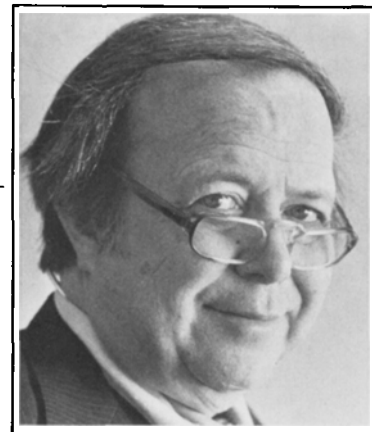


Photo by The Grand Rapids Press

Edward L. Moorhead, II, M.D.

How many Ed Moorhead stories do you know? Personally, I have hundreds...

There was the time that his staff had a necktie made with mine and Tom Tucker's telephone numbers emblazoned upon it, because Ed would call his office every other day to ask for one or the other...There were Ed's famous slide shows and his gentle humor about "Bozo the Oncologist."...There was the time he went to Phoenix and couldn't remember where the meeting was, and Dave King and about 30 physicians waited while I phoned around town trying to find him...There was also a time when he went back to his hotel room and forgot about the Board meeting he was chairing...There were the many times when he would call me up with some joke that was so bad that I would groan at the punch line.

Who else would have dozens of pens in his shirt pocket...12 look-alike dark blue blazers (always slightly disheveled)...and be part owner of a California-style fern bar in Grand Rapids? Ed was a genuine character, and his passing in January was an enormous loss.

Ed was also extravagant. Let's face it. But, what a wonderful extravagance! He could exasperate, and he could charm. Just when you thought that you might strangle him, he'd come up with an idea that would rock you off your feet. Of course, he'd have 50 bad ideas for every good one, but he always seemed to pursue the ones that were important. Indeed, many of his dreams changed the way cancer care is delivered in this country.

Somehow he had the foresight to write a little 30-page grant that won Grand Rapids a Clinical Oncology Program award, along with a dozen other hospitals around the country. Then, he went out and recruited a bright young aggressive administrative director, Tom Tucker, and set about organizing Grand Rapids' physicians into site committees to develop patient management guidelines. After he and Tom developed the guidelines for medical sites, they developed oncology nursing guidelines.

Then, through testimony before NCI committees, Ed sold the idea of a second test: The Community Hospital Oncology Program. Once CHOP was approved, he barnstormed around the nation to show his slides about how you could put together a first class community cancer program. Regardless of how you look at the evaluation data, there is no question that Ed's efforts, and those of the communities that followed his model, were the foundation of many of the strong cancer programs that we have today.

Next, he decided that communities really should have an opportunity to do clinical research...to be full members of the cooperative groups and bring investigational drugs to community patients while they contributed to the national research pool. This time, he and Bill Dugan were testifying before Congress, telling a Senate Committee about the wasted manpower and talent...about the patients with the long drives...about the potential to enhance the national research effort. Then Ed pulled together a group of ACCC folks from around the nation, and they put together a report on "Clinical Research in the Community" for ACCC. Despite some initial skepticism at NCI, the CCOP program was attempted and, today, almost 50% of all cancer patients accrued to clinical trials are entered by community physicians.

Another Ed Moorhead idea just became a reality: standards for community cancer programs. Under the guidance of Bob Enck a culmination of years of work finally ended when the Delegates recently voted on the standards. First Chairman of the Standards Committee? Ed Moorhead, of course. Ed's direction as ACCC president led the Association to broaden its membership categories to include freestanding cancer centers, HMOs, PPOs, hospice, home care, and group practices. And, of course, Ed masterminded ACCC's celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the National Cancer Act and the invitation to President Nixon. Outrageous, extravagant...important ideas!

There are two more ideas of Ed's that may yet come to pass: The first is to get together an organization of cancer patients to work with ACCC on reimbursement, insurance, and other cancer patient-related problems. Ed called it Patient Advocates for Cancer Treatment (PACT), because he thought it would be a compact between cancer patients and health care professionals to ensure that the patients' interests were not forgotten or ignored. The other idea was to form a "100" club of oncologists that would work together in their respective states to improve practice and cancer patient care.

His extravagance and creativity has had a vast impact. His gentleness touched so many of us. His humor helped us all cope a little better. And, yet, despite a style that sometimes left you bewildered, I will never forget the many times that Ed Moorhead went out of his way to help someone get started, or the many times he defended a friend in need.

You know, last year, when he was president of ACCC, Good Housekeeping named him one of America's top 25 oncologists. I remember Ed telling me that when the "lady called I told her she was looking for Dr. Moertel, not Moorhead. I only began to suspect that it wasn't a joke when she said that she had talked to Dr. Moertel the day before." Indicative of his wild sense of humor, Ed ran out and had buttons printed that read "I'm number 26!", which he gave to many of his fellow oncologists with the explanation: "I saw the Good Housekeeping list before they had to pare it down because they were out of space...and guess what?"

Boy, will we miss him!