



RON M. DAVIS, MD
1956 – 2008

Remembering Ron Davis, MD: AMA President and ACMG 2008 Annual Meeting Speaker

Ronald M. Davis, MD, immediate Past President of American Medical Association (AMA), and keynote speaker at the 2008 ACMG Presidential Symposium, died November 6, 2008 following a 10-month battle with pancreatic cancer. After receiving the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer in February 2008, Dr. Davis, a lifelong public and preventive health champion, helped raise public awareness of the disease, which affects 37,000 individuals in the US annually. His recognition of the ostensibly heritable nature of cancer in his own family was widely promulgated, and communicated in a meaningful way to ACMG members at the 2008 Annual Clinical Genetics Meeting in Phoenix.

Immediately upon learning of his diagnosis early last year, Dr. Davis cancelled most obligations but insisted on fulfilling a prior acceptance to speak at our annual meeting. The reason soon became clear, communicated in an extraordinary keynote address. Dr. Davis first surveyed the positive work of the modern AMA, specifically its roles in preventive medicine and in advocating health care for all. We were soon convinced this is no longer "our father's AMA." Ron then spoke passionately about the important role he was certain clinical genetics will play in the future in medicine and in cancer prevention, early diagnosis and treatment. He personally thanked members of ACMG for their important work and urged us to continue to promulgate the importance of genetics to the public. ACMG President Joe Leigh Simpson then relates, "Few of us will forget the speech's denouement, which began with Dr. Davis once again urging us to be cognizant of and to emphasize family history as a cornerstone of preventive medicine. The illustration was his own pedigree, culminating with the proband (Dr. Davis) shown as recently diagnosed to have pancreatic cancer, postulated due to a BRCA-like mutation."

Dr. Davis was born in Chicago, earning a bachelor's degree in zoology from the University of Michigan, a master's in public policy and his medical degree from the University of Chicago. During these formative years he wrote an important review on male determining regions on the Y chromosome (J Med Genetics, 1981 18:161-195); thus, Ron long shared bonds with ACMG members. He trained formally in epidemiology and took his residency in Preventive Medicine at the Centers for Disease Control. Dr. Davis wrote prolifically and was a founding editor of Tobacco Control, an international journal published by The British Medical Association. In announcing Dr. Davis' death, Dr. Joseph M. Heyman, MD, the chair of the AMA Board of Trustees, said "Ron, your life commands our respect. Your life demonstrates the best of our profession." We in the ACMG echo these sentiments. Dr. Davis' service as a young, vigorous, AMA President derived from a sub-specialty small in numbers has proved pivotal in reinforcing the place of our own College and sub-specialty holds in organized medicine.

*Portions from a publication in the AMA eVoice, November 13, 2008.