

Andrew Jay Drexler, in memoriam

Carolyn Robertson¹ | Zachary Bloomgarden²

¹Customized Diabetes Education, Mesa, Arizona

²Department of Medicine, Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Bone Disease, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, New York

Correspondence

Carolyn Robertson, Customized Diabetes Education, 2355 North Pyrite, Mesa, AZ 85207.

Email: crobertsoncde@gmail.com

Opposing views of death are exemplified by two Chinese phrases: One phrase emphasizes the impermanence of life, 人死如灯灭, comparing a person's death to the extinguishing of a lamp, whose flame, once put out, simply no longer exists. The other phrase, however, 人死留名, reminds us that what remains is the individual's name - that which uniquely identified them in the minds and hearts of their friends, colleagues, family, and all those with whom they came in contact during their lifetime. This latter view can justly be said to apply to Dr. Andrew Drexler. Andy's role as a physician was, simply, that of a uniquely caring and attentive healer, using his special expertise in the understanding and treatment of diabetes in helping the many, many people who came to be his patients. He was a doctor's doctor, particularly in the sense of reminding all who knew him of the importance of being always available and of spending sufficient time with patients to work out the right approach to their own unique problems - and we all realized that in putting his patients first, he was expressing his deep conviction that this must be the essence of the role of the physician.

Andy's father was a physician, and Andy determined early that this would be his path. He received his MD from the New York University School of Medicine in 1972, completed his residency in Internal Medicine at Barnes Hospital (1975-1976) and fellowship in Endocrinology at Washington University School of Medicine (1976-1978) in St. Louis, Missouri after spending 2 years at the National Institutes of Health in the Public Health Service at the Laboratory of Immunology, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (1973-1975). In 1980, he joined the faculty of New York University School of Medicine (1980-1998), advancing to clinical associate professor in 1984. He was the director of

the Diabetes Clinic in Bellevue Hospital (1980-1998), the director of the Diabetes Complications Center at the Rogosin Institute (1989-1992), and then after a period in private practice became the director of the Mount Sinai Diabetes Center in New York (1998-2002) (Figure 1A). In 2006, Dr. Drexler moved to Los Angeles to become director of the UCLA Gonda (Goldschmeid) Diabetes Center (2006-2016) and clinical professor of medicine at UCLA. In February 2016, he retired from academia and resumed private practice in Beverly Hills, California.

In the early 80s, soon after he completed his fellowship, he returned to New York City where he joined the faculty of Rockefeller University (Figure 1B). While there he worked closely with Dr. Charles Peterson and with Dr. Lois Jovanovic, involved in groundbreaking programs for the management of type 1 pregnancy and intensive insulin regimes for type 1 diabetes, focused on patient self-care, glucose monitoring, and the attainment of tight control. Over the past four decades, he was involved in the management of about 700 pregnancies in women with type 1 diabetes with virtually no complications, either of the mothers or the offspring. In the 1990s, Dr. Drexler was responsible for facilitating the transfer of over 30 pancreas transplant patients with type 1 diabetes and end-stage renal disease in the New York area to centers in other parts of the country, as pancreas transplantation was not then easily accessible. Dr. Drexler was involved in the utilization of new pharmacological therapies for patients with type 2 diabetes and in teaching those strategies to other physicians. He was a leader in the development of integrated practice approaches emphasizing multispecialty, multidisciplinary approaches to patients with diabetes, with effective collaboration and teamwork focused on patient-rather than department-centered care. He was an early and

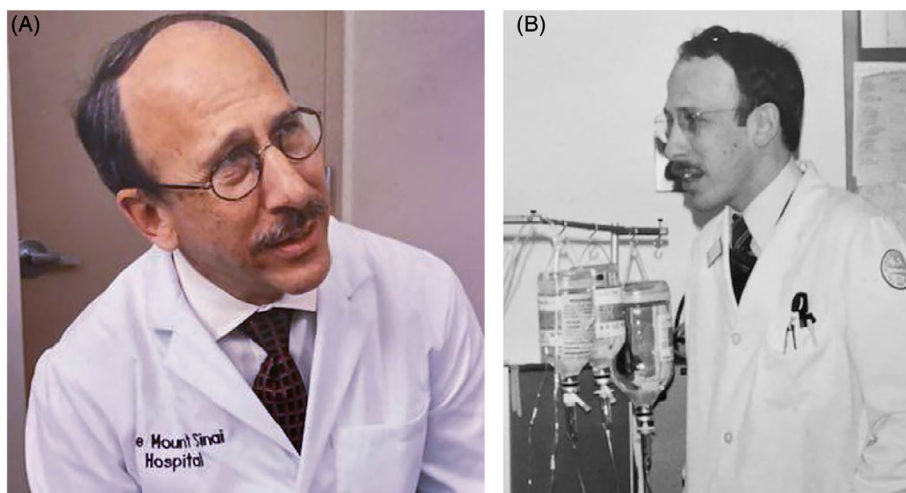


FIGURE 1 A, Andy at UCLA, 2008. B, Andy at Rockefeller University, 1980

persistent advocate of continuous glucose monitoring, smart pumps, and the use of computer software to help both patients and clinicians make sense of the diabetes.

Andy enjoyed the study of history and delighted in seeing relationships of current events to those of the past, sharing this understanding with his friends. A lifetime bachelor, over the past few years Andy met Kim Jasper. Their plans to spend their lives together were tragically ended by his development of illness, paradoxically, in view of the complex interrelationship of diabetes and lipid metabolism a liposarcoma, and one that progressed

all too rapidly. In illness, Andy's courage was a further example to us all, and just as he never relinquished his efforts to treat every one of his patients, he persevered in trying to understand and find the best treatments for his malignancy.

In the words of the Roman poet Catullus, *Frater, Ave atque vale*: "Brother, hail and farewell," hail, in the sense that we "salute" Andy as a special human being whose all-too-brief time helped so many others, and "farewell," or "goodbye," in our hope that the Eternal will remember and honor his name, as do we.