

Preface: The Living Legacy of Donald L. Morton



Dr. Donald Lee Morton's passing on January 10, 2014 marks a very sad day in the history of the fight against melanoma. Dr. Morton was recognized as one of the most influential and innovative legends of melanoma research and his clinical advancements spanned decades. His early groundbreaking work in melanoma remains the foundation of the current surgical oncology procedures, immunotherapy treatment, and diagnostic approaches, not only for melanoma, but also for numerous other cancers. Among his many major contributions to surgical oncology is the development of the sentinel lymph node biopsy procedure for early-stage primary melanoma and other solid tumors. This procedure has not only revolutionized the approach of staging primary melanoma patients, but is now a key factor in the current American Joint Committee on Can-

cer melanoma staging. This procedure is practiced worldwide and has also inspired industry involvement in the development of new products.

Dr. Morton was a pioneer in the analysis of cancer-associated antibodies to tumor-associated antigens in melanoma patients as they related to clinical outcomes. This cutting-edge work led to the development of adjuvant therapies and melanoma vaccine phase II/III clinical trials. He was a pioneer of intralesional melanoma immunotherapy such as Bacillus Calmette-Guerin and human monoclonal antibody therapy. His academic leadership led to the development of four major international multicenter clinical trials in melanoma, one of which, the Multicenter Selective Lymphadenectomy Trial (MSLT-II), involved more than 60 centers worldwide and is now completed and in the follow-up stage. He was fortunate to see the completion of the MSLT-I trial. Dr. Morton was also a proponent of new approaches of elective metastectomy surgery in stage IV melanoma patients at a time when no efficient therapies were available. The survival rates of his patients in phase II and III clinical trials are astonishing and are comparable or better than current approved therapies, particularly as related to durable and quality of life responses.

After treating John Wayne during his battle with cancer, with the support of John Wayne's family, Dr. Morton founded the John Wayne Cancer Institute (JWCI) in Santa Monica, California, a center that has achieved worldwide recognition.

Dr. Morton realized the necessity of a carefully maintained archival specimen resource for correlative translational studies six decades ago. He was instrumental and tenacious in obtaining and preserving melanoma tumor specimens from his surgeries and peripheral blood leukocytes and serum from all of his patients and from those participating in clinical trials. His long-term clinical follow-up database of patients led to the establishment of an unprecedented melanoma specimen bank at JWCI. This exceptional melanoma biospecimen repository,

which remains one of the oldest and best-known clinically annotated melanoma specimen banks in the world, has led to the development of countless translational studies such as antibody and lymphocyte, circulating nucleic acid, and circulating tumor cell monitoring of clinically annotated melanoma patients. More than 880 publications authored by Dr. Morton and a record-setting level of continuous National Institutes of Health funding on a large scale over multiple decades are based on proposals using the repository. He was one of the highest-funded and longest-funded principal investigators for more than 38 years.

Beyond his extraordinary career achievements, one of Dr. Morton's major attributes was his encouragement and support of young clinicians and scientists in human-melanoma-related studies. He strongly advocated a synergistic collaboration among these fields and served as a leading example of the many breakthroughs attained via such an alliance. He was one of the true pioneers in what we call today "translational research." Although Dr. Morton's expertise and wisdom will be greatly

missed, his legacy will continue through the many generations of young scientists and clinicians whom he once mentored in melanoma studies and treatments.

Donald Morton was truly a legend in surgical oncology, an icon as a surgical investigator, a pioneer in melanoma, a valued mentor, an authentic role model, and a cherished friend to many of us around the world. Though he led a busy professional life, he was also a devoted husband to his wife Lorraine and his family. His presence will be missed, but his impact on a myriad of colleagues, friends, and patients will live on. The authors of this special issue include Dr. Morton's closest surgical oncology colleagues and his ex-fellows who built careers around surgical oncology academics.

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