

I first met Mort over 40 years ago in the Newton basement of our legendary mentor, Louis Weinstein. Every Monday night, Louis' Infectious Disease troupes gathered there for Journal Club. Mort was an alumnus of the program while I was a Fellow-in-training.

Years later we connected again over Mort's new-found interest in HMOs:

Mort had conceived of the Tufts Associated Health Plan to help Tufts faculty adapt to a rapidly changing environment. In order to make this work for Private Physicians, Mort had developed a unique 3-way risk-sharing model that later was widely emulated by other private practice HMOs. Mort used to summarize his theory about how to get private physicians to cooperate, like this: "If you put them all in the same playpen, they'll eventually learn to play together"

Wouldn't Mort be pleased to know that now, one of the key elements of the Obama Health Plan, is the creation of so-called "accountable care organizations" ... a new name for what he developed, 30 years ago.

But Mort's role as the Founder and Chair of Tufts Health Plan was only a small part of who he was.

Mort was a physician; a public health leader; an innovator; but first and foremost, Mort was an educator. He truly loved Tufts Medical School, and his students. He taught students the importance of community medicine, public health, and population medicine. His vision of the skills needed by the modern physician was both expansive and prescient. He spawned innovative new educational programs - combined degrees for medical students in Public Health, in Management and Business, and even in International Law and Diplomacy.

Mort had a profound effect on medical education, and he impacted the lives of many. Alumni and faculty stop me all the time to ask about Mort, and to say how much he influenced their lives.

Despite his busy professional life, Mort was a family man. He was proud of and dedicated to Larry, Judy and Nancy and their children, and of course to his wonderful wife of 48 years, Margie.

In the last few years, when his health failed him, Mort was indeed lucky to have Betty, his new wife, there to provide the love and care that kept him alive until this week. Mort reciprocated by hanging on these last few days until Betty and their devoted friend Paul Wilner, could get here from New Orleans, after Mort had been transferred to Boston by plane 10 days ago, so he could spend his last days near his children.

Mort – generations of Tufts students and faculty, and colleagues at Tufts Health Plan, will miss you. We've missed you ever since you stepped down, and we'll miss you even more now.

Harris A. Berman, June 9, 2009