Joseph P. Kriss, MD

Joseph P. Kriss, MD, died unexpectedly on the the 9th of September, 1989, nine days after he retired from administrative duties as chief of the division of nuclear medicine at Stanford University Medical Center to become Professor Emeritus.

He was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1919, and spent his formative years in the town of State College, Pennsylvania, where his father was a faculty member in the department of biochemistry. Joe graduated summa cum laude from Pennsylvania State University College in 1939 and cum laude from Yale University Medical School in 1943. He then completed his internship and residency in internal medicine and research fellowship in endocrinology. In 1948, Joe moved to San Francisco to begin private practice and was appointed clinical instructor in medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine. Joe became assistant clinical professor in 1951, associate professor of medicine and radiology in 1957, and professor of medicine and radiology in 1962. In 1958, he was appointed director of the division of nuclear medicine, succeeding Robert Reid Newell, MD.

In research, he was an internationally recognized authority on the pathogenesis and treatment of thyroid disorders. His initial research on the thyroid was published in 1951. He isolated long-acting thyroid stimulator (LATS) and demonstrated that it was an antibody. In 1973, he demonstrated that radiation treatment of the extraocular muscles using a linear accelerator could successfully arrest and even reverse infiltrative Graves' ophthalmopathy.

Joe and his colleagues also developed techniques for measurement of thyroid hormones, thyroid antigens, and thyroid antibodies. His techniques for measurement of antithyroglobulin and antimicrosomal antibodies are universally accepted as the most sensitive currently available, though they were introduced 20 years ago. His early work on LATS led to a series of improvements in the sensitivity of the assay.

He was responsible for many other important advances in internal medicine and nuclear medicine, including nuclear cardiology. He published a series of papers in the late 1960s and early 1970s that showed the ability of nuclear cardiology to demonstrate valvular defects, intracardiac shunts, and the blood supply to the heart muscle via the coronary arteries. He also pioneered the use of artificial lipid vesicles as carriers of diagnostic and therapeutic radionuclides to target sites. He published a total of 164 scientific papers and book chapters.

Joe was interested in medical education, and at Stanford he was involved in the design of the flexible curriculum that allowed medical students to do research and focus on topics of particular interest to them. In recognition of his teaching, he received the Kaiser Award in 1975.

Joe expected a lot of himself and of his trainees. In 1975, in response to the relaxed attitudes of medical students and residents in terms of their dress and demeanor, he published a report entitled, "On White Coats and Other Matters."

Joe was a gentle, skilled, caring physician. It was a joy to watch him interview patients. He had the uncanny ability of getting to the crux of the clinical problem, and his patients came to recognize him as one who could be trusted to take responsibility for all aspects of their well-being.

Outside of the University, Joe held offices in various professional associations, including The Society of Nuclear Medicine and was a founding member of the American Board of Nuclear Medicine. Joe was also an established and accomplished artist.

Joseph Kriss is survived by his wife, two sons, and four grandsons. His sudden death is a terrible loss to them. Joe strove for excellence in everything he did and by doing so made those around him strive for the same values. He will be missed greatly by his family, his colleagues, his patients, and those in the field of nuclear medicine.

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