

IN MEMORIAM



## William H. Beierwaltes, MD, 1916–2005

**W**illiam H. Beierwaltes, MD, a pioneer in nuclear medicine and a past president of the SNM, died on August 14 in Petoskey, MI. He is credited as being among the first to espouse a combination of surgery and radioiodine therapy in thyroid cancer with a well-codified treatment and follow-up regimen, as organizing one of the first university programs for training in nuclear medicine, and as being an innovator in the successful detection of cancer with radiolabeled antibodies. A dedicated educator, he was the author of the first widely circulated textbook in nuclear medicine and trained hundreds of physicians and physicists in the specialty.

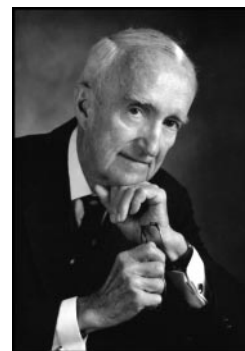
Beierwaltes was born in Saginaw, MI, and entered the University of Michigan (UM) in Ann Arbor in 1934. He received his undergraduate degree in 1938 and his medical degree in 1941. During his third year of medical school, he was asked to do an autopsy on a patient who had died from cancer of the thyroid. "From that day until the day I retired in 1994, thyroid cancer became my main obsession," he told *JNM* Newsline in 2000. His senior year thesis was on thyrotoxicosis (which he had witnessed first-hand with 2 family members), and, during his internship and residency at Cleveland City Hospital (OH), he was assigned a study of the use of antithyroid drug treatment of thyrotoxicosis. By the time he returned to UM to complete his residency, he had published the favorable results of this treatment in 27 patients.

As an instructor in internal medicine (1945–1947), Beierwaltes began to publish regularly on thyroid topics, including goiter and hypothyroidism. In 1946, at the suggestion of Cyrus E. Sturgis, MD, chair of the Department of Internal Medicine at UM, Beierwaltes was sent to the first short course on the medical uses of radioisotopes offered by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Held at the AEC facility in Oak Ridge, TN, and headed by Marshall Brucer,

the course was part of the U.S. government's efforts to encourage peaceful uses of atomic technology.

Beierwaltes was 1 of 5 attendees in this first class, which covered, among other topics, the use of radioactive iodine for the study of thyroid metabolism. It is to this class, as well as to contemporaneous efforts at the University of California at Los Angeles and the Massachusetts General Hospital, that the origins of nuclear medicine as a discipline are often traced.

On his return to Ann Arbor from the course at Oak Ridge, Beierwaltes found himself besieged with colleagues at the UM Hospital who wanted to learn more about the medical applications of radioisotopes. "The interest came not only from people doing imaging," he told Newsline. "It seemed like everybody in the hospital wanted to find out more about nuclear medicine—although we didn't call it that then." In 1952 he was appointed head of the UM Clinical Radioisotope Service. The demand for instruction sessions was so great that in 1957, with coauthors Phillip C. Johnson, MD, and A.J. Solari, Beierwaltes published *Clinical Use of Radioisotopes*. Although numerous AEC manuals, most coming from the team at Oak Ridge, had appeared in the previous decade, Beierwaltes's text became the first guide for many setting up fledgling nuclear medicine departments in the United States and around the world. When the UM Nuclear Medicine Division was formed in the early 1960s, Beierwaltes became its head. He helped form the UM nuclear medicine fellowship training program for young and midcareer physicians, one of the first in the nation.



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Over the course of his career, nuclear medicine at the UM Hospital grew to occupy more than 10,000 square feet in the clinical unit and 36,000 feet of research space in 3 buildings, with a total annual budget of more than \$8 million, most of which was self-generated from grants and patient service. At the time of his retirement from the hospital in 1987, he had secured the largest PET grant to date from the National Institutes of Health, allowing the hospital to acquire not only a PET scanner and cyclotron, but also support laboratories and personnel and the building to house them.

Retirement at the University of Michigan was mandatory and age determined, and, at 70, Beierwaltes moved to Grosse Pointe, MI, and worked at both William Beaumont Hospital (Royal Oak, MI) and at St. John Hospital (Grosse Pointe). He “finally and unequivocally” retired from seeing patients on August 31, 1994, although he continued for some time to participate in the Tuesday tumor conferences at the UM Nuclear Medicine Department. In 2002, he moved to Petoskey.

Awards and honors followed Beierwaltes throughout his career. Among these was a Guggenheim Fellowship (1966–1967), followed by a Commonwealth Fund Award (1967). In 1982 he was awarded the SNM Georg de Hevesy Nuclear Medicine Pioneer Award. In the same year, he received the Distinguished Faculty Award of the University of Michigan. In 1984 he de-

livered the Georg de Hevesy Lecture and received the accompanying medal at the congress of the European Association of Nuclear Medicine. He was a visiting professor at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Hospital and in the Department of Radiology at Harvard University. Among his many invited lectureships was a keynote address to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Advanced Studies Institute in Italy (1984), where he spoke on “Radiolabeled Antibodies for the Treatment of Cancer: Past, Present and Future Prospects.” He was a member and past officer of numerous professional societies, including the SNM (which he joined in 1958), serving as president in 1965–66 and as an associate editor of *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* from 1975 to 1982. In 1994, the American Medical Association recognized Beierwaltes with their highest honor, the Scientific Achievement Award, noting his contributions as a clinician, teacher, and investigator. Beierwaltes wrote or coauthored more than 250 peer-reviewed papers, 61 other academic papers, 4 books, and 77 book chapters. After his retirement in 1994, he set out to write his memoirs. The resulting volume, *Love of Life: Autobiographical Sketches* (New York, NY: Vantage Press; 1996), is a disarmingly frank, moving, and fascinating look back at a life lived well.

Beierwaltes is survived by his wife of 63 years, Mary-Martha; his two sons, William Jr. and Andrew; and his daughter, Martha Maloney. ❀