

## Eugene Lange Saenger, MD

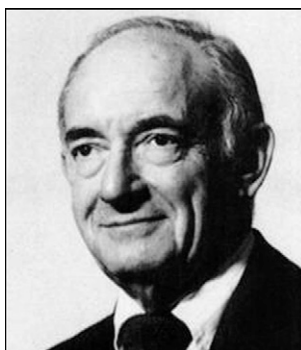
**E**ugene Lange Saenger was born March 5, 1917, in Cincinnati, OH, and died there on September 30, 2007. He was predeceased by his daughter, Katherine, and wife, Sue Reis Saenger. He leaves a son, Eugene L. Saenger, Jr., and 4 grandchildren. He lived a rich, honorable life and led his medical specialty and his community as a remarkable visionary in many areas.

Gene attended Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati. He received his AB in biochemical sciences from Harvard College in 1938 and his medical degree from the University of Cincinnati (UC) College of Medicine in 1942. Four years later he had become a board-certified radiologist, pursuing the specialty of his maternal uncle, Sidney Lange, MD, who was both a private practitioner and first chair of the Department of Radiology at UC. Gene initially joined his uncle in private practice, but his own extraordinary vision, curiosity, energy, and leadership led him to become 1 of the founders of the specialty of nuclear medicine. Gene saw, as few did, that for the first time the body's own physiology could be used to revolutionize diagnosis and therapy.

In 1948, 5 years before Dwight Eisenhower announced the Atoms for Peace program, Gene opened the Radioisotope Laboratory at the UC Medical Center. For his prescience in envisioning an entirely new medical specialty uniquely grounded in chemistry, physics, pharmacology, and engineering, he would receive the Georg Charles de Hevesy Nuclear Medicine Pioneer Award from SNM in 1987.

Gene Saenger was also among the first physician-scientists to research the acute effects of radiation. He was the author of 1 of the first texts on radiation accidents and a leader in this area worldwide for decades. Gene was among the first American consultants brought to Chernobyl in 1986 when the former Soviet Union asked the United States for help in evaluating medical issues that might result. Another of his medical concerns was the long-term effect of radiation and the setting of safe radiation exposure standards, which led to his service as a leading member of the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements and as a consultant to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

He asked penetrating questions about the efficacy of everything physicians did and helped formulate and



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popularize scientific approaches to making evidence-based medical decisions, cofounding the Society of Medical Decision Making in 1979. He wrote more than 200 medical articles and book chapters and presented more than 50 invited or named lectureships. In recognition of his extraordinary career he was awarded the gold medals of the Radiological Society of North America (1993) and the American Roentgen Ray Society (1998), the

highest honors the specialty offers. Gene received the Daniel Drake Award, the UC College of Medicine's most prestigious honor, in 1988.

His medical career was but one facet of the diamond that was Gene. He was a steadfast and true friend to many in health or sickness. Gene could be counted on—always. Laughing easily, he was able to suffer fools, at least for a while, as he taught them—us—a bit of his wisdom and vision. He could be very funny. He raised the art of creative profanity to new, colorfully picturesque, and evocative heights. He was a connoisseur in many areas, including modern art, fine food, ballet, opera, Parisian haberdasheries (according to 1 of his granddaughters), and hunting dogs—among others.

He cared deeply about the poor and was a quiet philanthropist in many areas. He selflessly chaired 4 separate, exhausting Hamilton County (OH) tax levy campaigns to fund care for the medically indigent, reaching out to all levels of the community. The levy passed each time with majorities greater than 60%. He was also a board member and supporter of the May Festival and the Cincinnati Ballet and a member of the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC, among other prestigious organizations.

Gene possessed a rare equanimity that was frequently tried in the last 2 decades of his life. He endured multiple cancer surgeries without complaint. Coronary artery disease required invasive therapy several times.

He also led a team devoted to treating patients with end-stage, widespread metastatic cancer with whole-body radiotherapy to reduce symptoms and to increase the possibility of prolonging life. Gene had been trained in radiotherapy in his residency, and he hoped he could help patients who had been told nothing more could be

done. He wanted to treat patients creatively, effectively, and safely. When he embarked on this program in the 1960s, few precedents existed for whole-body radiation, but the practice continues today for selected patients. It was also his idea to look for markers of radiation effects as each patient was treated. The logical source of funds for such a program at this time was the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), where Gene had made many friends while doing research during his Army stint at Ft. Sam Houston, TX. The dual research motives of testing whole-body radiotherapy and examining the effects of therapeutic radiation on the body seemed obvious and appropriate at the time and throughout the 1960s. However, the political climate of the 1970s led to consideration of many DOD-funded medical studies as suspect.

Thus the whole-body radiation project came under fire by a few well-meaning but uninformed individuals. The result was a tremendous national controversy, through which Gene steered a clear path of honor and decency, all the while receiving legal advice to save his comments for a planned U.S. Senate hearing. The hearing, unfortunately, never materialized, and the facts of the case were not laid out before the American public. A few smoldering embers of the issue were reignited under strange circumstances in 1993 and 1994, with grossly inaccurate allegations. Again Gene and his colleagues were told to make no public statements. The

public never learned the facts: that earnest informed consent efforts were made for all patients (with documentation preceding any standardized requirements in this area), that the doses of radiation employed could cause no pain, that no other therapies had been available at the time, and much more. It all went untold. A federal civil rights lawsuit was settled out of court 6 years later with no admission of fault by the defendants.

The toll on Gene, who took the brunt of media abuse, was heavy, but his magnificent equanimity, the support of his many good friends, and his certainty that he had always done the right thing for these dying patients whom no one else would assist helped him through this time. Sadly, but inevitably, local and national newspapers focused on this controversy in obituary articles on Gene, rather than emphasizing sufficiently the life and accomplishments of this great man. Many patients and their families will never know that some of the blessings they now enjoy are the result of the life and good works of Eugene L. Saenger, MD.

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