

In memoriam: Harold H. Harrison, MD, PhD (1951-2018)

July 2018—Harold H. Harrison, MD, PhD, 67, Pennsylvania state commissioner in the CAP Laboratory Accreditation Program and a member of the Inspection Process Committee, died suddenly June 6 of cardiac causes.



Dr. Harrison

Dr. Harrison joined the Geisinger Health System in Danville, Pa., in 2007 where he was director of clinical pathology and director of Geisinger Regional Laboratories. In a June 6 statement, Geisinger called Dr. Harrison an “intellectual powerhouse and a consummate clinical laboratory scientist” who “ensured excellence in clinical lab services.”

Conrad Schuerch, MD, chairman emeritus of laboratory medicine, Geisinger, describes Dr. Harrison as “warm, interesting, upbeat, sociable, and unflappable,” and says he was “brilliant in many dimensions.”

Earle S. Collum, MD, chief of staff and medical director at St. Joseph’s Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix, recruited Dr. Harrison to the CAP Laboratory Accreditation Program as Arizona state commissioner in 2005 when Dr. Harrison worked in Phoenix- area laboratories. He describes his colleague as friendly, optimistic, devoted to doing the right thing, and persistent. “When everyone else had completed all of the details, Harry always investigated further than the rest of us,” Dr. Collum says of Dr. Harrison’s inspection work. “If there was a question he wanted to answer, no obstacle large or small would prevent him from getting that answer.”

Leonas G. Bekeris, MD, CAP regional commissioner for New York and Pennsylvania, said it was a privilege to work with Dr. Harrison for 10 years.

“He was a very dedicated, smart, personable person,” says Dr. Bekeris, a staff pathologist at Phoenixville (Pa.) Pathology Associates. He recruited Dr. Harrison to become the central Pennsylvania commissioner when Dr. Harrison moved to Pennsylvania to work for Geisinger. “He was a perfect commissioner,” Dr. Bekeris says.

Dr. Schuerch, who hired Dr. Harrison at Geisinger, recalls immediately hitting it off with Dr. Harrison during the interview. Dr. Harrison shared his enthusiasm for statistical mathematics and his interest in analyzing clinical laboratory data, and “there was an energy in his discussion of his research,” Dr. Schuerch says.

Dr. Harrison’s strong academic and commercial laboratory experience, including having served as associate medical director, medical director, and corporate medical director of genetic services at Quest Diagnostics between 1997 and 2000, made him stand out as a candidate. “This was a guy who had a background that’s unlike other pathologists,” Dr. Schuerch says. “It was broad in the commercial side and deep on the academic side.”

“He was probably one of the best, certainly the best I’ve known, for his depth and breadth of understanding of the field of clinical pathology.”

Dr. Schuerch says Dr. Harrison was an asset to Geisinger in many ways, including as its “greatest resource on regulatory matters,” thanks to his CAP state commissioner role. He was known, too, for his ability to analyze

problems and address concerns about implementing new and different tests. “He was very responsive to people’s inquiries. He would dig to the very bottom of the science in answering questions.”

In his role as director of Geisinger’s some 70 clinic laboratories, Dr. Harrison oversaw quality control and “raised the level of performance of the [Geisinger] laboratory system,” Dr. Schuerch says, adding that Dr. Harrison broke new ground when he instituted QC based on Sigma statistics across the Geisinger system.

“When things went wrong here, he just focused, buckled down, dug to the bottom, and spent the time to go through all of the cases to find which ones might have been affected. He understood the underlying science and technology well and was able to troubleshoot and implement corrective measures,” Dr. Schuerch says.

Dr. Collum predicts it will not be easy for Geisinger to replace Dr. Harrison. “You don’t just find somebody and plug one of those guys in. Harry was unique.”

Dr. Harrison is survived by his wife, Brenda, two daughters, and a son.

—Amy Carpenter Aquino