

Harvey Blank – An Appreciation

Harvey Blank was founding chairman of the department of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery in the University of Miami School of Medicine. He died on October 5th, 2001 after a protracted spinal ailment having retired in 1985 after 30 years as Head of Department. Now nearly one year on it is timely to remind the Dermatology community of the outstanding contribution that he made to the world of skin.

It was extremely fortunate for me that my mentor and boss between 1965 and 1969 (Dr Stephen Gold) knew Harvey Blank and that is how I came to spend the year of 1969 in his Department in Miami. At that time there was no more prestigious department and I counted myself as very privileged indeed to be offered this professional opportunity. Harvey Blank had gathered round him a group of fine dermatologists and skin biologists and the department hummed with excitement. He was largely

responsible for the development of the first oral antifungal agent- Griseofulvin. He was also heavily involved in the emergence of topical corticosteroids as powerful novel anti-inflammatory agents for the treatment of inflammatory skin disorders – especially eczema.

Harvey Blank was an excellent clinician and was the first to identify herpes zoster and varicella as being caused by the same virus- one of many important findings that he and the Miami team made to dermatological virology. The erythrasma micro-organism was described jointly by HB and two “Brits” who were in the department. The first of these was David Taplin – the well known microbiologist who now, after 40 odd years in the Miami department is shortly to retire – and the other was the dermatologist Imrich Sarkany.

Harvey Blank was honoured by many societies and institutions but I know that in particular he greatly valued his honorary

membership of the British Association of Dermatologists. Amidst all his honours and discoveries we must remember him for one thing in particular and that is his teaching and the attitudes he inculcated and the thinking he employed in tackling knotty diagnostic problems or in designing a complex program of patient management. When he presided over a grand round or a seminar his strength, experience and humanity all showed. Harvey had that spark in him that made him great as a leader rather than just good. All of us that knew him are saddened at his passing but are content in the knowledge that he will long be remembered.

Harvey Blank was comforted and sustained in his later years by his wife Joan and is also survived by his two daughters from his first marriage.

Professor R Marks

Cardiff