

## Celebrating Dr. Morris Collen's Life

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Heritage writer



Dr. Morris Collen aboard the "Flying Sorceress" 1957; from "A Bud's Eye View" photo album by David Steinhardt On October 27, 2014, a "Celebration of Life" of Dr. Morris F. Collen, M.D. was held at the Kaiser Center Auditorium in Oakland (Calif.). It was a moving tribute to a beloved giant in medicine and medical informatics who passed away at the age of 100 on September 27th.

Tracy Lieu, MD, MPH, Director of Kaiser Permanente's Division of Research, hosted the speakers and welcomed the audience on behalf of the DOR and the Permanente Medical Group. She led off with a tribute video and slideshow, followed by Kaiser Permanente leaders and a member of the Collen family adding their recollections of Dr. Collen's ? "Morrie's" ? role in our community. These are excerpts from their remarks.

**Robert Pearl**, MD, Executive Director and CEO of TPMG:

"[Morrie] told me how he was the second physician in the nation to administer penicillin. I still have his paper that he wrote about the different sub-types of pneumococcus, and the particular kind that he was treating, patients never recovered from. And he gave a dose equivalent to a quarter of what we give today, and?for one dose, not for a whole course?and the patient lived. And the miracle, he explained how God had touched the world in a way?[and] he was not an overly religious man?but in a way that allowed us now to have those who would die, now live."

"How could he see, in 1951, that in 2014 Tracy and the people at DOR would still be using data that he collected in the 1950s to help us understand disease. How could he understand, in the early 1960s, when there were no such things as a computer; there were wired boxes with punch cards that?these punch cards would provide information that would allow us to understand heart disease and stroke, allow us to understand hypertension when at that time there were no medications, there were no treatments? How could he see all of that?"

**Philip Madvig, MD, Associate Executive Director, TPMG:**

"What I knew about Morrie as a leader and founder and negotiator and clinician within the Permanente Medical Group was enough to have accounted for at least two full careers. And yet what I heard about [at Morrie's 100th birthday] was all the medical informatics work, and I realized that we, in Kaiser Permanente, think of Morrie as *ours*. He was *our* founder and *our* leader, and he was *our* guy, and we owe him this huge debt of gratitude. And then here's a whole additional group of people who said very much the same things. He was *our* founder, he was *our* leader, he was *our* negotiator, he created *our* specialty. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude."

**Tracy Lieu, MD, MPH, Director of DOR:**

"I had the chance to talk with Dr. Ted Shortleff; he's a past-president of the American

Medical Informatics Association, who said, 'Morrie had a very mild mannered leadership style. He'd come up with these radical ideas, and because he was so respectful and persuasive, he could get people to go along.' Not many research groups in this country can point to their founder as also being the founding father of a whole scientific field that's not only vibrant, but increasing in both relevance and impact today. We are so happy to be initiating really robust and broad work in clinical informatics at DOR. And this is really a validation of Morrie's original vision in informatics. We have so many exciting projects; we really look forward to expanding our work in clinical informatics. And we are tremendously proud and energized to be part of his heritage, and to carry on Morrie's work."

**Joe V. Selby**, MD, MPH, Executive Director, Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute; Director, DOR 1998-2011.

"I like to think of Morrie as the incidental researcher; not the *accidental*, but the incidental researcher. He didn't really set out to be a researcher, although he did manage to get his first two papers published while he was still a resident at LA County [General Hospital], and both of them were on diabetic coma. So that shows that he was a visionary; he recognized a critical role of diabetes in understanding all disease. He really set out to become a physician and, very quickly, a physician leader. Over time he came to appreciate and share Sidney Garfield's vision of this new model of care and realized that research was gonna be required to get there. So he became a researcher."

"Morrie taught us that one needs to be prepared to expand one's thinking at any point in life; to bring research into decision making in health care; and to bring the responsibilities and the concerns of the decision makers into the minds of the researchers to learn to work together on teams. TPMG is the perfect place to do this, the questions and needs are often clearer, and they come into view earlier here. The data and the capacity to do efficient research are better here...The pathways to implementation are shorter and straighter here."

**Gary Friedman**, MD, MS, Director, DOR 1991-1998; Research Scientist Emeritus.

"I think most of you?most of the people in the audience probably have known him for maybe a few decades, like Phil. And the person they remember is an avuncular, grandfatherly figure that you see in this beautiful picture. But he was not like that when I first worked for him. He'd always been a gentleman, no question about that. But in those earlier years he was also a very commanding and forceful figure. And he was superbly capable of getting large scale grants, support for his pioneering projects in medical computing and in the multiphasic screening effort. And he was very successful in getting the best from himself and from those of us who worked with him."

**Joe Terdiman**, MD, PhD, Director of Information Technology (Retired), DOR.

"In his later years Morrie had two goals, of which one was almost completed and one barely started. The first goal was to complete a revision of his History of Medical Informatics, which only covered the period from 1950 through 1990. He wanted to update the book to cover the years from 1990 to 2010, and would frequently update us at these lunch meetings on the progress of his revisions. As mentioned before, although he didn't quite complete the book, his long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Marion Ball, assured him that she would complete it, working with others.

The second goal, which represents his inquiring mind and his focus on research, was to study the use and interactions of multiple drugs in the elderly. He would often remind us at these meetings that every morning he would take a dozen pills and down a cup of coffee, as did millions of the elderly. What interactions would occur between those pills and the coffee, he asked. And would any of those interactions reduce or increase the potency of those medications? Until very end he was always thinking about scientific questions that could be answered by mining KP data."

**Jamila Gui** (Director, Strategic Programming Group, DOR) read a poem "Secret Pilgrimage" by Rabbi Alvin Fine, which began with a phrase that clearly described Dr.

Collen:

Birth is a beginning

And death a destination

But life is a journey.

The memorial concluded with comments and a rhyming verse/limerick by Morrie's son **Randal Collen**.

"I hope many of you had the pleasure of dining with Morrie, because that was one of his favorite things to do. I poked fun at him in my limerick poem, for his dining. But his 90th birthday party was kind of a roast, you know, and I don't think he would mind if we had another laugh again.

Dad always loved to laugh; he always had a story or a joke or a pun. Dining was a great celebration for Morrie. My mom's maiden name was Diner; Morrie's mom, my Grandma Rose, probably always coaxed him: "Eat, moyshe, eat!"

But really it hid the fact that not only did Morrie have a world class intellect, and a will of iron, he also had a world class digestion. When we were kids, my dad would take us to Bertola's, in Lafayette. And we would fight over the pepperoncinis. Later he would love to take us to Sizzler's. He would swoon over Sizzler baked potatoes. No gourmet, my dad, but he would love to eat. He loved rotisserie chicken, and sashimi, and dim sum. And to suck the marrow out of the osso bucco bones. He could eat me away; he could eat me under the table."

Randal's touching and humorous tribute ended with these lines:

It was Kaiser, a man wiser than most men of Industry

With a dream to grow an HMO that took Morrie to Berkeley.

You see, a dream to grow an HMO took Morrie to Berkeley.

Where he could really eat. This urge he couldn't suppress.

The average ravaging savage could not pass Morrie's test.

Oh, yes, he loved to eat. Volumes he'd ingest.

A hungry bear, he didn't care, at dining he was best.

Oh yes, at dining he was best.

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