

Benjamin Spargo, SB'48, SM'52, MD'52, professor emeritus of pathology at the University of Chicago and a renowned renal pathologist, died in his sleep at Montgomery Place, on May 30, 2014. He was 94 years old.

Spargo was a pioneer in applying the electron microscope, a scarce resource at the time, to clinical diagnosis. In the late 1950s, he was the first to develop diagnostic criteria and demonstrate the value of routine use of the electron microscope for biopsies of the kidney. He and his team methodically mapped out the microscopic structural changes to kidney cells associated with various renal diseases. They eventually convinced other pathologists that focusing on consistent correlations between changes in structure and altered function could dramatically improve diagnoses.

Although many physicians were skeptical of the new technique, a 1973 study by Dr. Spargo and a colleague from Yale showed that in 11 percent of cases, electron microscopy led to a substantially different diagnosis than light microscopy. In an additional 36 percent of cases, electron microscopy could refine and sub-classify the diagnosis. It could also document changes caused by advancing disease, or by treatment. Such studies slowly convinced others in the field that electron microscopy could provide a more accurate diagnosis and even predict response to treatment.

Pathologists came from all over the world to study renal pathology with Spargo, especially electron microscopy, which was not yet widely available. His use of this technology led to rapid progress in the understanding of a variety of specific kidney diseases, especially those affecting the glomerulus.

One classic observation made with the electron microscopic was Dr. Spargo's 1959 description of a lesion specific to preeclampsia. His term, "glomerular capillary endotheliosis," is now found in every text book.

Benjamin H. Spargo was born on August 11, 1919, in Six Mile Run, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Broad Top High School in Defiance, Penn., in 1937. He began college while working in Chicago. During this period, he met Barbara Scollard, a young woman from Watford City, North Dakota, who was training to become a nurse. They married in 1942.

World War II refocused their plans. Dr. Spargo joined the United States Army Air Force in 1941 and was based in March Field, California. His interest in science was recognized when he joined the Army and he served as the director of a medical laboratory.

After leaving the military in 1946, Dr. Spargo resumed his education. In 1948, he graduated from the University of Chicago with a bachelor's degree in biological sciences and began medical school, also at the University. In 1952, he completed his master's degree in pathology and graduated, with honors, from the medical school.

After a one-year internship at the University of Michigan, Dr. Spargo returned to the University of Chicago for his pathology residency. He stayed at the University for the remainder of his career,

joining the faculty as an assistant professor in 1955. He was promoted to associate professor in 1960 and professor in 1964, a post he held until he took emeritus status in 1994.

Dr. Spargo's research was consistently supported by highly competitive federal grants, including a Research Career Award from the National Institutes of Health's Heart and Lung Institute, a Public Health Service Research Career Award, and two grants from the NIH's Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Dr. Spargo published more than 100 research studies and book chapters and was an author or co-author of several books about renal pathology. His text book, *Renal Biopsy Pathology, with Diagnostic and Therapeutic Implications*, published in 1980 by Spargo, Seymour and Ordonez, was used by many medical schools. He also served on the editorial boards for several leading journals, including *Human Pathology*, the *American Journal of Kidney Disease*, and the *American Journal of Pathology*.

He is survived by his daughter, Patricia Spargo, and one grandchild. A memorial service has been scheduled for 2 pm on Saturday, June 28, at Montgomery Place, 5550 S. Shore Drive. In lieu of flowers, donations should be sent to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Obituary from:

Kenneth S. Polonsky, MD, Dean/Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs
The University of Chicago Medicine

Obituary provided to the RPS by:

Anthony Chang, MD