



In Memoriam: Richard J. Kitz, MD

With great sadness, we share that Richard J. Kitz, MD, Mass General emeritus anesthetist-in-chief, died Tuesday, Sept. 19, at the age of 88. Dr. Kitz led the Mass General Department of Anesthesia, Critical Care and Pain Medicine from 1969 to 1994, building and shaping it into one of the largest and most respected international clinical, research and training centers for anesthesiology and its associated sciences. An innovative, thoughtful and highly effective administrator, Dr. Kitz pushed the boundaries of the discipline of anesthesia, understanding the value of integrating technology and expertise from other fields to advance knowledge and improve the quality of care for patients.

Dr. Kitz recruited to Mass General trainees who became a significant portion of the next generation of leaders in anesthesia and intensive care medicine, including a robust cadre who, over the following decades, became chairs of more than 20 major anesthesia departments in the United States and abroad. A beloved colleague, friend and mentor, Dr. Kitz was known for his warmth and loyalty toward the staff and especially residents, who he always considered part of his extended family.

Dr. Kitz's brilliance was apparent immediately upon his arrival at Mass General at the age of 39. He focused on the hospital's existing strengths, including the first respiratory intensive care unit in the nation, established in 1961 under Henning Pontoppidan, MD, and on building vital areas, including a blood-gas laboratory, led by Myron B. Laver, MD; a pediatric anesthesia team under John Ryan, MD; and the first U.S. cardiac anesthesia team under Dr. Laver, followed by Edward Lowenstein, MD.

Dr. Kitz's own basic organic chemistry research, which began at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and proceeded to the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, focused on neuromuscular pharmacology, pain management and the action of drugs. As head of a Mass General research laboratory, he was integral to the project that discovered the popular short-acting muscle relaxant, Mivacurium, which was one of the two first Mass General inventions that brought significant royalties to the department and hospital. He also launched a research effort that aimed to better understand the fundamental processes that occur during anesthesia and the mechanisms behind controlled unconsciousness and reactions of the central nervous system. This work, which continues today, shines an important light on the brain under anesthesia, enabling anesthesia delivery to be more tailored and more targeted.

Dr. Kitz was the author or co-author of more than 100 scholarly publications and was an author of the Mass General Anesthesia Department's landmark volume *Clinical Anesthesia Procedures of the Massachusetts General Hospital*. The success of this widely regarded work led the department to publish two subsequent books. He also served as editor of an historical compendium "*This is No Humbug!*" *Reminiscences of the Department of Anaesthesia at the Massachusetts General Hospital*, published in 2002. Passionate about the history of the Mass General – specifically the story of the first public demonstration of anesthesia at the Mass General in 1846 – Dr. Kitz helped endow a permanent anesthesia exhibit in the Mass General's Russell Museum.

Dr. Kitz was a strong advocate for patient safety. He brought into the department bioengineers, including Ronald S. Newbower, PhD and Jeffrey B. Cooper, PhD, who were later joined by an anesthesiologist, Nathaniel P. Sims, MD, who with others formed a team to gather data, identify

risk factors and look systemically toward improving anesthesia processes and practices. He created an environment in which engineers and clinicians worked hand in hand with a common goal of safer delivery of anesthesia. With this increased knowledge about anesthesia risks came development or adoption of technologies that enabled better ways to monitor changes in vital signs, and equally important, to address equipment design issues that enabled human error. Later, from this interdisciplinary team came technology innovations, now adopted around the world, to more safely deliver intravenous drugs. Indeed, Dr. Kitz and the engineering team he enabled at Mass General were at the leading edge of a transformational time in anesthesia safety, re-defining the clinical practice nationally in a way that has, no doubt, saved thousands of lives.

Dr. Kitz was the second Henry Isaiah Dorr Professor of Research and Training in Anesthesia at HMS – the first ever endowed U.S. anesthesiology chair. He also served as principal investigator for both the Harvard Anesthesia Research Center and the Basic Science Research Training in Anesthesiology Program from 1969 to 1993, and directed the Anesthesia Residency Program at Mass General from 1969 to 1994. Dr. Kitz was appointed Faculty Dean for Clinical Affairs at HMS in 1994, a position he held until 1999 in which he oversaw the changing relationships between patient care, research and educational efforts of the HMS clinical faculty.

Among his many accolades, Dr. Kitz served as a board member of the American Board of Anesthesiology from 1974 to 1986, including one year as its president. He was chairman of the American Board of Medical Specialties' Committee on the Study of Evaluation Procedures, was elected to Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences (now the National Academy of Medicine) and was the founding editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Clinical Anesthesia*. In 2000, he received an honorary doctor of science degree from his alma mater, Marquette University, was an honorary fellow in the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland, and a Fellow of the Royal College of Anaesthetists of England. In 1997, Harvard Medical School established the Richard J. Kitz Professorship of Anesthesia Research in his honor.

Dr. Kitz was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Oct. 25, 1929. After teaching a cadaver lesson for a class of occupational therapists-in-training that included a young lady in a red plaid skirt, he married Jeanne Marie Hogan in 1953. They had a daughter, Anne Marie Kitz, now a theological scholar. He earned his medical degree from Marquette University in 1954, and then served as a surgical intern at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons (CUCPS) at the Presbyterian Hospital. He loved to play baseball growing up in Oshkosh, and he snuck onto the best team in town, the Navy team, by joining the Navy at 16 years old. Although he was shortly discovered to be under age, he kept his assigned (low) Navy serial number, which gave him the seniority to run a Marine Corps base in Japan as chief medical officer for two years. He then returned to CUCPS to complete his two-year residency in neurosurgery and anesthesiology in 1960. He served as associate professor of anesthesiology there until 1969, when he came to the Mass General and Harvard Medical School – and began the remarkable journey that has left a legacy on the institutions he loved and the discipline he shepherded.

Dr. Kitz loved sailboat racing and won many races, often with fellow Mass General physicians as crew members. In 1981, he served as race chairman for the Marion to Bermuda race.

On behalf of a grateful hospital that is so much richer for Dr. Kitz's many contributions and leadership, we extend heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. A memorial service is being planned for a later date.

Peter L. Slavin, MD
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Timothy G. Ferris, MD
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Jeanine Wiener-Kronish, MD
Mass General Anesthetist-in-chief