

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

ERAN GELLER

(1937-2009)

In 1993, Eran Geller was recruited to Stanford and the Veterans Administration Palo Alto Health Care System from his position as Chair of Anesthesiology and Critical Care at Tel-Aviv Medical Center, to create a multidisciplinary Surgical Intensive Care Unit (ICU) Service at the VA. Under Eran's leadership, the Surgical ICU Service at the VA Palo Alto Hospital became one of the earliest and best examples nationally in the VA Health Care System of an Intensivist-run Multidisciplinary ICU. It does not take much imagination to conjure up the many hurdles that had to be surmounted in taking on this role in a new land. However, Eran was no stranger to adversity. He had provided medical care during the Arab-Israeli conflicts in the middle of a scorching hot desert where the surfaces of tanks were used as frying pans for eggs. He provided anesthesia by himself in an operating room during the first Gulf War while wearing a gas mask, having sent his staff to safety. He brought the experience of managing mass casualty situations, both from the military battlefield and the civilian battlefield of terrorist attacks. He brought stories of air raid sirens and SCUD tactical ballistic missiles, of fleeing to safety once clinical responsibilities allowed, and of the great risks he took in driving over open ranges of desert that were vulnerable to foreign attack.

In 1997, with the opening of the new VA Palo Alto Medical Center, the Surgical and Medical ICUs were merged into one unit, and Dr. Geller became the Medical Director of the new 15-bed Medical Surgical ICU, staffed jointly by 8 full-time critical care physicians from the Anesthesia and Pulmonary/Critical Care Medicine Services. Dr. Geller served as the ICU Medical Director at the VA Palo Alto until his illness forced him to step down in March 2007. With his passion and commitment to critical care medicine, Eran was a pioneer and a visionary leader in the ICU. He always wanted our ICU at the VA to be on the cutting edge of critical care medicine, and he was an early adopter of many technologies now commonly used and considered the standard of practice in critical care medicine. These included the use of electronic medical record and bar-code medication administration systems, wireless laptops for use by clinicians in the ICU to access patient information in real time at the bedside, state-of-the-art patient ventilators and bedside monitoring systems, and bedside portable ultrasound machines to reduce the risk of complications associated with central venous catheter replacement.

Eran's crowning technologic achievement was his work in developing ICU clinical databases within the VA Health Care System. He was instrumental in designing and implementing the use of a common ICU patient charting system, known as PICIS, at the five VA ICUs throughout our geographical area. This enabled us to compare ICU data and outcomes both within and between these different ICUs, and to standardize the use of clinical best practices in all 5 ICUs. He was one of the chief architects of an ICU Data Warehouse, a central repository for clinical data captured electronically on all ICU patients

throughout our VA Region, and now the largest VA ICU database in the United States. This powerful database allows clinicians to determine relationships between patients' clinical states and their outcomes in the ICU. Under the leadership of Dr. Geller, the ICU Service at the VA Palo Alto Medical Center has become the top performing VA ICU nationally in terms of clinical outcomes.

Transforming the Surgical ICU at the VA from one that was run exclusively by surgeons to one led by a team of intensivists was a novel and complex task on many levels, and the subsequent merging of the Surgical and Medical ICUs into a single unit at the VA was even more daunting. But Eran persevered in pursuit of these goals in the face of widespread doubt and enormous challenges, convinced that these were changes to the VA Health Care System which were essential to providing patient-centered care in the ICU. Eran faced many conflicts over the years related to the creation and maintenance of the VA ICU Service, but he did so calmly and patiently, with dignity and grace. It was Eran Geller's pioneering vision, courage, and passion for critical care medicine that created a multidisciplinary ICU Service at the Palo Alto VA which is now one of the top performing ICUs nationally in the VA Health Care System.

Over the years, Eran selflessly shared his personal experiences and wisdom with his colleagues. He gave us an insider's view on the Arab-Israeli conflicts. He also conveyed his insights with regards to raising two sons. He loved them more than he ever truly let on. Eran had experienced many hardships in his life with the various wartime conflicts, terrorist bombings and the death of his father at a young age. However, what brought him to tears was when his boys were attending Gunn High School and one of the other students set off a rather large explosive in the quad as a chemistry class prank. Eran lamented he had brought his children from Israel to beautiful Palo Alto to pursue their education in a safe environment, and yet he could not get away from bombings—this was the only time we ever saw him cry.

Eran Geller was also a wonderful mentor. He helped a generation of house staff and junior faculty with making the transition from student to teacher. He told them how it would feel awkward at first, but he ushered them through the transition from resident to critical care fellow to attending physician in the ICU. We could always seek his counsel on a difficult patient or when we felt all therapeutic modalities had been exhausted. His help was always appreciated. We will always appreciate the fact that Eran made each of us feel more like a colleague and friend than merely his employee or trainee.

Eran Geller was the quintessential adult learner. Unlike many busy clinicians, Eran managed to keep up with reading the piles of medical journals stacked around his office, and participated in scientific meetings at every opportunity. He was using the term "evidence-based medicine" in the ICU before it became part of the mainstream medical lexicon. Eran was also an early adopter of evidence-based best practices in critical care, and would implement new changes to our clinical practice in the ICU seemingly as quickly as they were proven in the medical literature. A typical conversation with Eran would begin with him saying, "Have you seen the latest article in the New England Journal of Medicine?"

We should start doing this for our ICU patients!” Even as he faced his own death from cancer, Eran was still taking time to learn new things in his life.

Eran was a very thoughtful and caring human being. Even after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and had only a short time left in his own life, he continued to visit his colleagues and staff at the VA whenever we had our own medical, family, or professional problems. In the end, Eran demonstrated tremendous dignity in the setting of the final hardships of his life, including dealing with the severe pain from his pancreatic adenocarcinoma.

Eran Geller was an outstanding physician, administrator, mentor, colleague, and friend. He has touched the lives of many, and he has taught us much about practicing patience and peaceful compromise, demonstrating grace under fire, and maintaining a healthy passion for living. The world is a better place because of him, and we are better people for having known him. We will miss him greatly.

Committee:

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