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## Memories of Gene Herbek, MD

*To the Editor.*—The sad news of the untimely demise of our dear friend and esteemed colleague Dr Gene Herbek came to many of us here in Japan as a profound shock. On behalf of all of his many colleagues, collaborators and friends in Japan, I would like to express our sincere condolences to his family. We will miss not only his support and guidance, but also his wit and smile.

Dr Herbek had been well-known in our community of Japanese pathologists for a great number of years. We had known him as a keen College of American Pathologists (CAP) inspector, as a lecturer, and as a teacher. Dr Herbek helped us several times while he served as the president of the CAP, supporting the Japanese Society of Pathology activities in 2014, 2016, and a few short months ago in February 2020. At that time, he spent several days at a major Japanese medical center helping them make the decision to gain CAP accreditation.

In 2016, we were privileged to have Dr Herbek as our keynote speaker at the 105th JSP annual meeting. His passion and commitment were palpable as he detailed the many activities of the CAP aimed toward the advancement of the practice of pathology and its ever-increasing role in advancing the quality of patient outcomes. His talk was very well received. It just so happened that my lecture followed his, and I was honored that he stayed to listen to my lecture, called



Gene Herbek, MD.

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Robert Y. Osamura, MD, PhD.

a “message from a senior pathologist to young pathologists,” even though most of the lecture was in Japanese.

After a long week of meetings, we held a party in Dr Herbek’s honor at the Tokyo American Club, hosted with thanks by Mr Mark Colby and CGI K.K (Tokyo, Japan). Many leading members of the Japanese pathology community attended. Dr Herbek not only further educated us on the finer points of cutting a fine steak, he also educated us on the proper way of preparing a drink called a Manhattan. I think this latter gift stayed with us well into the following day.

After a long week of assisting at a Japanese medical center, I was honored to have dinner with Dr Herbek on February 4 of this year. I can tell you that he was in fine form as we spoke about Japan’s Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare’s recent decision to approve the CAP as the official authorized accreditation body for genetic laboratories in Japan, something we have been working on for several years. We also talked about the recent training program for Japanese pathologists to become CAP inspectors, with the first class composed of 17 people.

Gene, you have offered us so much over the years. Nothing I can say would adequately express our feelings of gratitude and thanks. Safe travels, my friend. You are, and will remain, dearly missed, forevermore.

Robert Y. Osamura, MD, PhD

Past President, The Japanese Society of



Gene Herbek, MD, at the 106th Japanese Society of Pathology annual spring meeting 2016 in Sendai, Japan.

*Pathology, President-Elect, International Academy of Pathology*

Gene Herbek was a giant in so many ways. He was a man with intelligence, compassion, generosity, and vision. After 2 years of collaborative planning, Dr Herbek and the CAP established the original See, Test & Treat program in 2001. The first program of its kind for the screening and prevention of cervical and breast cancer was held in McLaughlin, South Dakota, on the Standing Rock Reservation, and the following year the program was held in Rosebud, South Dakota, on the Rosebud Reservation. A man ahead of his time, Dr Herbek recognized a need to provide Native American women not only with free breast and cervical cancer screening, but also same-day test result reporting, and the necessary follow-up treatment. This legacy program addressed several issues that were considered barriers to health care that women faced, including transportation, communication, child care, and cultural constraints. It was Dr Herbek’s view and vision, along with that of the CAP, that a pathologist would lead, educate, and work with patients directly during a See, Test & Treat event.

The seed that was planted by Dr Herbek grew until there were multiple offshoots around the country, particularly in geographic areas where there was a tremendous need. In 2008 the program was initiated in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at North Point Clinic, and in 2010 a See, Test & Treat program was held for the first time at an

## Letter to the Editor

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academic medical center, Tufts Medical Center, to serve women living in the Chinatown area of Boston, Massachusetts.

The program evolved at Tufts Medical Center because I attended a seminar where Dr Herbek spoke about his experiences in the early days of See, Test & Treat, and his reward from sharing test results with his patients—a true doctor-patient interaction. I was inspired, motivated, and challenged. That a pathologist could drive a patient-centered program fueled my desire to emulate the man who created this program. In 2014 I was proud to receive the Jean and Gene Herbek Humanitarian Award in his honor for my work on the 5-year Tufts Medical Center experience.<sup>1</sup>

What I valued most about Dr Herbek was his wisdom, his approachability, and his willingness to embrace change, even though it could mean adversity. That passion for our

profession was evident during our conversations over many years, whether it was at the CAP Council on Scientific Affairs, CAP Annual Meeting, the Leadership Academy, the Association of Pathology Chairs, or any event where he was present. No one, pathologist or staff, was too small to have his ear for feedback, thought sharing, or even small talk. He always had his eye on the “forest” of pathology as he looked through the trees. We were all important.

Yes, Gene Herbek was a giant in so many ways. We all look up at giants. They are taller and bigger than most of us, and Gene Herbek’s legacy of kindness, vision, and leadership will endure. I will miss him greatly: role model, mentor—and friend. Thank you, Gene.

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