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Hastings, Caroline

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COMMENTARY

The ASPHO 2023 Distinguished Career Award goes to Dr. A. Kim Ritchey

Caroline Hastings 

Division of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland, School of Medicine, University of California San Francisco, Oakland, California, USA

Correspondence

Caroline Hastings, Pediatric Hematology Oncology, UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland, 747 52nd Street, Oakland, CA 94609, USA.

Email: Caroline.hastings@ucsf.edu

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FIGURE 1 A. Kim Ritchey, MD.

Congratulations to Dr. A. Kim Ritchey, the recipient of the 2023 American Society of Pediatric Hematology Oncology (ASPHO) Distinguished Career Award (Figure 1). This prestigious award is presented annually by ASPHO to a senior physician who during his or her career has had a major impact on the subspecialty, through some combination of research, education, patient care, and advocacy. His leadership on a regional and national level is far reaching and includes serving in critical roles as an executive leader for the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP), the Children's Oncology Group (COG) (and its predecessor organizations), the Hemophilia Treatment Centers, editor-in-chief of the

National Cancer Institute (NCI) Physician Data Query (PDQ), and his leadership roles in ASPHO, including committee chair positions, executive board of trustees, and culminating as the president of ASPHO. Kim is the consummate clinician, with expertise and national recognition across the fields of hematology and oncology. He has emerged as a thought leader who questions dogma and has been a major contributor and leader in every major cooperative group in the specialty. His inspirational leadership style is guided by his innate altruism, authenticity, and belief in his students and colleagues.

Training clinicians and mentoring clinician–scientists has been one of his priorities beginning early in his career. Kim exemplifies what we gain from having at least one great mentor in our lives. He provides advice, guides introspection, is candid, and adheres to his core beliefs, all of which result in development of long-term trusting collegial relationships. His coaching is energizing, but also practical and insightful. He invests in the individual and the impact of his words and actions are long lasting. Regardless of where we are in our careers, Kim is always a person that is sought when there is the need for a good listener and focused discussion regarding a difficult decision to make, addressing a brewing crisis, or just to get some straight forward logical patient care advice.

Kim was born in Denver, CO, USA in 1946. His father was a child psychiatrist in the army and from a young age he aspired to become a better doctor than his father! He grew up in Shaker Heights, OH, USA with his older sister Linda, and younger brother Kevin. As a high schooler he aspired to go to Dartmouth, and without parental knowledge, drove to New Hampshire to get a look at the college (perhaps the only thing he ever did wrong). He did attend Dartmouth College and majored in philosophy, likely imbibing in him the fundamentals of the critical thinking skills he would later fine tune as a clinician and scientist. Kim attended medical school at the University of Cincinnati

Abbreviations: ABP, American Board of Pediatrics; ALL, acute lymphoblastic leukemia; ASPHO, American Society of Pediatric Hematology Oncology; CNS, central nervous system; COG, Children's Oncology Group; PDQ, Physician Data Query.

then located to Baltimore for residency at Johns Hopkins. He met his future wife, Candy, who was a NICU nurse at Hopkins, and they started their family with the birth of their first child Matthew during this time. Following 2 years of service in the Navy at Portsmouth, VA, USA, he entered the Pediatric Hematology Oncology fellowship program at Yale University. It was during this time he met his lifelong mentor, Dr. Howard Pearson, whose joy of working with children and conducting impactful clinical research would lead Kim down his own productive and influential career path. They contributed medical literature on pathophysiology of hematologic conditions that still hold true today.¹⁻⁵ Kim would go on to value, and hold true to his heart, his role in mentoring future clinicians, scientists, and leaders in the profession. He would also emerge as a physician who inherent values of optimism, patience, empathy, and people skills to rightfully earn the respectful title of leader.

During his fellowship training, Kim and Candy welcomed their second child, Mandy, followed 4 years later with their third child, Kate, to complete their family. At this time, he became the clinical chief at Yale, just 5 years after completing his training. He was subsequently recruited to West Virginia University to serve as section chief of pediatric hematology oncology. Thirteen years later, he was recruited to become the chief of the Division of Pediatric Hematology Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and remained in that role until 2012 (14 years). He has assumed many academic leadership roles at UPMC inclusive of vice chair for clinical affairs in the Department of Pediatrics and currently serves as the vice chair for International Affairs. He was also tapped to provide leadership in several departments including Infectious Diseases and Rheumatology as the interim division chief. Kim embodies the concept of great leadership. He is a caring and talented administrator who has successfully led divisions during times of transition. He believes in his visions and ideas, and most importantly, in his faculty. His leadership style has been described as quietly firm, decisive, thoughtful, and attentive, and he enjoys running a meeting and keeping a team focused on priorities. His impeccable guidance, wisdom, kindness, and generosity are the qualities his peers and mentees have come to appreciate and undoubtedly why he is often sought by universities and organizations to lead new endeavors.

Kim served as the study chair for two consecutive Pediatric Oncology Group trials that helped define the prognostic significance of time to relapse for marrow and extramedullary recurrences in acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). These principles continue to be applied in the development of subsequent clinical trials, including the later generation COG extramedullary ALL trials. His contributions have led to changes in practice that have improved the outcome and quality of life of our patients with ALL. He is responsible for a change in treatment paradigm for patients with isolated central nervous system (CNS) relapse of ALL that has led to significant improvements in cure rates by developing the first trial that delayed CNS-directed radiation, allowing intensification of chemotherapy.⁶⁻⁹ He is nationally recognized for his expertise in ALL, and particularly extramedullary relapse, supportive care, and quality of life initiatives.¹⁰⁻¹² He has also served as the chair of the Data Safety and Monitoring Committee within COG, a role that

provides oversight and direction to assure the integrity and safety of clinical trials as they are conducted within the cooperative group network. He has focused clinical and academic effort and mentorship in the areas of hemophilia and bleeding disorders and has been the driving force behind many chapters and editions of Hoffman's *Hematology: Basic Principles and Practice* on hematologic manifestations of childhood systemic disease, an incredible resource for trainees and practicing hematologists.¹³⁻²⁰

Kim's contributions extend internationally with his recent work in advancing global education of clinician researchers in under-resourced countries. He serves as the vice chair of international affairs with the Department of Pediatrics at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in its endeavor to foster global health partnerships. He is also currently an active advisor for the development of an academic pediatric department in Kazakhstan.

Perhaps some of Kim's greatest achievements are his relationships with his patients and dedication to them on a personal level while optimizing the clinical research cooperative group studies to advance care of children worldwide. He has been described as a "gentleman physician." He feels privileged to care for every one of his patients and their families. His patients adore him, and this is perhaps the most impactful and rewarding aspect of being a doctor. His clinical mentees describe his bedside manner as the ultimate expression of compassion and confidence, modeling for them what they hope to achieve with their patients. Kim has been recognized with over 20 awards from medical students, pediatric residents, and hematology oncology fellows, as well as peers, patient groups, foundations, and societies. He is a beloved teacher to all. He is a master clinician and imparts an effective and rational approach to complicated medical dilemmas. His influence has not been limited to his institution. Since 1994, he has been a member of the NCI PDQ editorial board, transitioning to editor-in-chief in 1997. This valued resource is utilized by clinicians and organizations as an important educational and treatment tool for clinicians and patients/families alike to be able to understand an oncological diagnosis and disease process as well as define the standards of care for pediatric cancer and ensure access to accurate and comprehensive medical information. He served on the ABP Certifying Exam Committee for General Pediatrics for 17 years, as well as the Sub-board for Pediatric Hematology Oncology for 6 years, leading to an important transition of board testing and recertification focusing on the practicing physician's area of clinical care and research. Additionally, he served on the ABP Foundation Board of Directors, the ABP Executive Committee, and the ABP Subspecialties Consortium.

Kim has been a palpable presence in our own professional society, the ASPHO, serving on many committees as a member and chair, as well as on the Executive Committee, and as the president from 2012 to 2014. He continues to volunteer for the society on the nominating committee as well as graciously providing thoughtful and knowledgeable guidance for the current leadership.

Though an accomplished physician and clinician-scientist, Kim remains humble, and those of us fortunate to know him well hardly hear from him directly of his accomplishments and accolades. His humility is evident in his manner, listening skills, humor, and

attentiveness to everyone. He has raised a family who also values family and friends, relationships, and community. He is internally driven to always do the right thing, even when it could be met with controversy or inherent risk. His medical student, resident, and fellow mentees collectively consider him a critical person in their career development who models grace and empowerment of others in his leadership style.

Kim has established a great legacy as one of our most talented leaders and advocates in pediatric hematology oncology. He has made significant and diverse contributions to the practice of pediatric hematology oncology, education and certification, professional development, and development of quality programs within institutions, clinical trial cooperatives, and our professional society. Kim displays grace in leadership, valuing the human side, greater self-awareness, and genuine connection to people. He has raised a generation of talented and thoughtful trainees who have witnessed the value of contributions to the health and well-being of their patients and their specialty and choose to emulate this in their careers. He is a devoted husband, father and grandfather, physician and educator, a life and career mentor, and dear friend to many. Congratulations Kim, for this deserved recognition of your achievements by your peers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Caroline Hastings  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3149-0762>

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