



IN MEMORIAM



In Memoriam—Robert M. A. Hirschfeld, MD, MSc

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Robert M. A. Hirschfeld, MD, MSc, ACNP Fellow Emeritus, and Professor of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell, died peacefully at home, after a brief illness, surrounded by his loving family, on February 10, 2023, at age 80. He was elected to the ACNP in 1989; serving as co-chair and chair of the Advocacy Committee for 11 years; Chair of the Pharmacoeconomic committee; a member of the Public Concern committee; and the Ethical Legal committee. Bob was known internationally for research on the diagnosis and treatment of depression and bipolar disorder. He made major contributions to understanding the classification of depression and bipolar disorder, their clinical course, relationship to personality disorders, and treatment with medication and psychotherapy. He developed the Mood Disorder Questionnaire (MDQ), one of the most widely used screening assessments for bipolar disorder in the world, and translated into 19 languages. A friend recently asked what aspect of his work had the greatest impact; and without hesitating, Bob said the Mood Disorder Questionnaire (MDQ), “because it enabled physicians to more accurately diagnose an extraordinary number of people with bipolar disorder who would not otherwise have been correctly diagnosed.”

Bob received his BS from MIT in 1964; attended the University of Michigan medical school and subsequently received Michigan’s

Distinguished Achievement Award. Like many Michigan Alumni, Bob was extremely passionate about Michigan football; but he was cautious to not be too optimistic, even if Michigan was undefeated, in case their season was ruined by losing their last game of the year to archrival, Ohio State. Bob completed his psychiatry residency at Stanford; and subsequently spent 18 years at the NIMH, as Chief of the Mood, Anxiety and Personality Disorders Research Branch; and was the Clinical Director of NIMH’s Depression/Awareness, Recognition, and Treatment Program.

Bob authored over 200 scientific papers and abstracts in leading scientific journals; and served as Chair of the APA Workgroup on Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Bipolar Disorders. Bob received numerous honors; including the Research in Mood Disorders award from the American College of Psychiatrists, the Nola Maddox Falcone Prize from NARSAD, the Gerald Klerman Lifetime Research Award from the National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association (NDMDA—renamed to Depression and Bipolar Alliance), the Jan Fawcett Humanitarian Award from the NDMDA; and a Special Commendation from the APA.

From 1989 to 2013, Dr Hirschfeld was the Harry Davis Professor, and Titus Harris Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. He moved to NYC in 2015, and became a Professor at Cornell Weill, treating patients; teaching and supervising residents; and consulting with faculty and residents on difficult patients. Bob was a leading advocate for the mentally ill; spending 6 years as Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board of the NDMDA (renamed to Depression and Bipolar Alliance), while playing a key role in transforming the organization into one of America’s most powerful voices for people with depression and bipolar disorder. He also served as President of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and was a member of other influential scientific boards, including the American Anxiety and Depression Association.

Dr Hirschfeld was devoted to his family. He is survived by his mother, Adeline Medalia, PhD; his brother, Larry Hirschfeld, PhD; his daughters, Julie and Sasha Hirschfeld; his sons, Andy and Teddy Hirschfeld; and his grandchildren, Micah and Oscar Killmer. He was pre-deceased by his wife and journalist, Ellen Kingsley Hirschfeld.

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