

2014 Distinguished Public Service Award

Presented to Robert L. Brent

(K. Classic, G. Roessler)

The fifth recipient of the Health Physics Society (HPS) Distinguished Public Service Award is Robert L. Brent, MD, PhD, Distinguished Professor and Louis and Bess Stein Professor of Pediatrics, Radiology, and Pathology at the Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Emeritus Chairman of Pediatrics and Director of the Clinical and Environmental Teratology Laboratories at the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children, Wilmington, Delaware.

One of the attributes for this award is "service to the general public that significantly contributes to the relationship between the public and the health physics profession." Bob's contributions to the profession's public information efforts are unequalled. He frequently speaks at HPS meetings about communicating with the public, provides continuing-education courses on radiation effects and the developing fetus, and offers counsel to many families via the HPS website Ask the Experts (ATE) feature since its beginning more than 20 years ago. Through ATE and in his clinical positions, he has consulted with hundreds of thousands of pregnant women, their spouses, and/or their physicians regarding radiation exposures.

Bob was born in Rochester, New York in 1927. Since the age of 8 he dreamed of becoming a doctor. He received academic scholarships for his college, medical school, and graduate school education. He proved that he was a precocious student and deserving of this support by completing his AB in 1949, MD with honors in 1953, and PhD in radiation biology and embryology in 1955 from the University of Rochester.

During his college and medical school training he worked as a research associate in the genetics and embryology divisions of the Manhattan Project at the University of Rochester. There he began his studies on the teratogenic effects of ionizing radiation. Before graduating from the University of Rochester medical school, he was appointed to head the university's embryology division. He was the first research (1953) and clinical (1954) fellow of the March of Dimes involved in congenital malformation research. He trained at Massachusetts General Hospital in pediatrics and spent his army tour at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research as Chief of Radiation Biology and Assistant Chief of Pediatrics. He was involved in the nuclear bomb biological effects program and radiation embryological research at Walter Reed from 1955 to 1957.

In 1957, Bob took a position at the Jefferson Medical College where he was Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics from 1965 to 1995. During this time the department grew from 3 to 140 full-time faculty members at three pediatric facilities, including the newest affiliation at the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for children, where Bob directs the Clinical and Environmental Teratology Laboratory.

A pillar of the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP), Bob was first elected to the Council in 1973 and served until 1997 when he was elected to Distinguished Emeritus membership. One of the capstones of his career was his chairmanship of NCRP Report 174 (2013), "Preconception and Prenatal Radiation Exposure: *Health Effects and Protective Guidance*."

In 1966, he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine. He has been a member of 15 professional societies and was a founding member of the Teratology Society, serving as president in 1968. For 17 years he was editor of *Teratology*, the most-cited journal in the field of congenital malformations research.

He has received numerous awards and honors, including the 1995 HPS Landauer Award and the 2000 HPS Robley Evans Commemorative Medal. In 2013, he received the John Scott Award from the Board of Directors of City Trusts of Philadelphia, for his work on "environmental causes of birth defects including environmental exposures to drugs, chemicals, ionizing radiation, microwaves, and ultrasound."

In addition to a busy life full of academic and scientific achievement, Bob has always made time for his devoted family. His wife, Lillian, was a reading specialist in public schools for over 25 years. Their two sons, David and Lawrence, are renowned physicians and their daughter, Deborah, is a superb psychiatric nurse. (Sadly, their son, James, an accomplished pianist and composer, died unexpectedly at age 26 on a basketball court in 1979.) The Brents are blessed with 13 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.