

Duncan Clark Awardee



Robert Berg, MD

1977

Robert Berg, MD (1919-2006) was founding chair of the University of Rochester's Department of Community and Preventive Medicine. During his tenure, Dr. Berg established the University's Community and Preventive Medicine program as a national leader. The Medical Center's decision to adopt community health as one of its four missions can be directly traced to him. In 1968, he published a community survey of the health status and service needs of the elderly residents of Monroe County. This study served as a model nationally and internationally as communities recognized the need to finance and deliver health services to growing populations of the elderly.

Dr. Berg, a native of Spokane, Washington, graduated from Harvard College in 1940 and Harvard Medical School in 1943. After serving his internship and residency at Massachusetts General Hospital, he was on active duty at the U.S. Navy Hospital in Chelsea, Mass. He then spent a year at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. He returned to Massachusetts General as chief resident in medicine, and then was promoted to several positions at Harvard Medical School.

In 1958, Dr. Berg was recruited to the University to establish the Department of Community and Preventive Medicine. He became the first to hold the endowed position of Albert D. Kaiser Professor. A history of the Medical Center describes the recruitment of Dr. Berg and the formation of the department as an innovative move that was critically important in imprinting on the school's teaching program a commitment to community health. Dr. Berg and his colleagues played a significant role in the development of the Regional Medical Program, a cooperative community-wide effort to enhance the education of all health-care providers. They also helped build a network of community health centers.

After only two years at the University, Dr. Berg served for a year as acting administrator of Strong Memorial Hospital during a time of transition at the School of Medicine and the hospital. He later led an expanded department called the Department of Preventive, Family and Rehabilitation Medicine at the Medical Center. He also served as associate dean for planning in the School of Medicine. He retired as department chairman in 1984.

Dr. Berg was appointed as a chairman or member of several national and state boards and committees. He frequently spoke out on health care, costs and the limits of care. In 1975, he was one of five experts on a symposium panel in New York City that discussed disease prevention and "the illusion of immortality."

In 1990, Dr. Berg headed an Institute of Medicine committee that issued a report called "The Second 50 Years" that found many of the disabilities of the elderly are preventable and criticized doctors and public health experts for writing off the older generation as being beyond help.