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# Eugene Orringer, Director of UNC School of Medicine's MD-PhD program, has died



*Eugene Orringer, MD, professor of medicine and director of the UNC School of Medicine's MD-PhD program, died November 10.*

Over the course of his career, Orringer distinguished himself both as a hematology researcher and as an educator who played an essential role in developing UNC's ability to nurture young physician-scientists, serving as program director of the School of Medicine's MD-PhD program for more than 20 years.

"Gene was a consummate physician-scientist who spent his career advancing the field of sickle cell disease research and cultivating a passion for research amongst the many individuals he mentored. His work promoting the development of young physician-scientists at UNC is evident in the successes of those who trained with him, and his impact will continue to be seen in their work," said William L. Roper, MD, MPH, Dean, UNC School of Medicine, CEO, UNC Health Care. "He will be greatly missed by us all."

Jeffrey Houpt, MD, who preceded Dr. Roper as Dean of the School of Medicine and CEO of UNC Health Care, remembered Orringer's selfless nature.

"Gene Orringer did more to advance the careers of others than anyone I know," Houpt said.

Julia Brittain, PhD, who received her doctorate from UNC in 2001 and currently serves as an associate professor of cell biology and anatomy at Augusta University wrote this about her mentor, Orringer, in an article published in 2014:

"Dr. Orringer remains a profound, positive force in the careers of basic and clinical researchers who trained with him in Chapel Hill. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to work with Gene know and appreciate the depth of his investment in us, in hematology, and in his patients."

Morris Weinberger, PhD, Vergil N. Slee Distinguished Professor of Healthcare Quality Management at UNC's Gillings School of Global Public Health, and Susan Pusek, MPH, Director of Education and Training Programs, NC TraCS, offered this remembrance of their close colleague:

"Gene's upbeat personality, warmth and caring were hallmark traits that made Gene respected and loved both at UNC and across the country. He is recognized nationally for his unwavering commitment to developing the next generation of biomedical researchers, for establishing UNC's national reputation as a place that values career development, and his leadership in innovative

training. One only needs to see the scores of investigators at UNC who have come through his programs to understand how much he has changed the research and mentoring environment across our campus."

Orringer served as director of the Education and Training Core at UNC's North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences (NC TraCS) Institute. He was instrumental in helping to secure the NIH CTSA grant, and served as a leader and advocate for TraCS since its beginnings.

John Buse, MD, PhD, NC TraCS Director and division chief of endocrinology in the department of medicine, said, "Gene — 'Dr. O' to most of his trainees — was like a father to a generation of students and faculty involved in translational and clinical research, nurturing and exhorting them to achievements beyond their dreams. His loss is a huge blow to many, including me."

In 2012, Orringer delivered the Norma Berryhill Distinguished Lecture, during which he focused not on his academic achievements, but on the great joy he found in working with and mentoring young physician-scientists.

Orringer received his MD from the University of Pittsburgh in 1969. After training in both internal medicine and hematology he moved to Chapel Hill and joined the School of Medicine faculty in 1975. He received a Research Career Development Award from the National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute in 1982 and from that point forward consistently held peer-reviewed grant support from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Together with his colleague at Duke University, Marilyn Telen, MD, PhD, Orringer helped to develop the Duke-UNC Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center, one of only 10 NIH-funded comprehensive sickle cell centers in the country. As a researcher, Orringer served as a national leader in NIH-funded clinical trials that demonstrated the ability of hydroxyurea (HU) to reduce the severity of acute symptoms in patients with sickle cell anemia. These studies were pivotal in the FDA's approval of HU as the only drug currently available specifically for the treatment of sickle cell anemia. Over the course of his career, Orringer was among the highest awardees of NIH funding, both at UNC and nationally.

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