EDITORIAL

Tribute to Anthony L. Zietman MD, FASTRO

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Hagiography: adulatory writing about another person (OED)

“I’m not dead! I feel fine.” Old Man, Monty Python and the Holy Grail

If this appears to be a tenuous or discordant connection —hagiography and death—a simple glance at the obituary page serves as a prime example of both. Notices of a loved one’s demise are often written in a style that embraces soaring prose to embellish success and minimize failure over the course of a lifetime. Such is not our task today, however. Friends, rad onc, countrymen, I come to praise Zietman, not to bury him (Julius Caesar, Act 3 Scene 2, WS Eichler edition).

This issue of the IJROBP marks the end of one era and the dawn of another. After ten years at the helm, guiding the original concept of Dr. Phil Rubin and then taking the baton from Dr. Jim Cox, the third Editor-in-Chief of the Red Journal, Dr. Anthony L. Zietman, will exit, stage left, while Dr. Sue Yom, understudy and successor, prepares for the lead role. But as Anthony takes a well-deserved final bow, let’s take a step back and read the reviews of the changes he initiated and the impact of those changes.

When The Zietman Show opened in 2012, expectations were high, knowing Anthony’s creative spirit, tempered by the reality of following a living legend, Dr. Jim Cox. Jim had moved the Red Journal in significant ways, ones that Phil Rubin likely could not have imagined. Submissions quadrupled on Jim’s watch with a subsequent doubling of the impact factor, an astonishing achievement by any measure. Perhaps most importantly during his 15-years at the helm, Jim steered the RJ into the digital age, creating new avenues for engaging the journal with its readers, both at home and abroad, while significantly reducing the interval from submission to acceptance. Complacency by the new guy would not be an option, however. The status quo would never be good enough.

Expansion under Dr. Cox, however, was something of a mixed blessing. Anthony stepped into a significant backlog of articles necessitating creative solutions to break the bottleneck, including the advent of electronic publication. Manuscript management was revamped to facilitate a more thorough (and timely) review of submissions while maintaining the highest standards for scientific integrity. He and his senior editors created new platforms for education and scholarly discourse by fostering columns such as Oncology Scan, Around The Globe and the extraordinarily popular Gray Zone. Not surprisingly, the impact factor has risen dramatically, from 4.105 in 2011 to 7.038 in 2020, a staggering leap forward, and while there are a number of reasons for this upward trajectory, perhaps the simplest and most accurate is that Anthony Zietman became the impact factor.

On a more micro level, Anthony had made a profound difference on the lives of patients, colleagues and trainees as an exceptional researcher devoted to clinical excellence, as well as an educator and mentor to hundreds of residents over his career. He has served the specialty with integrity and distinction at the highest level as the 52nd President and Chair (2009-'11) and was awarded the ASTRO Gold Medal in 2016 for his many contributions to the field. On a personal note, Anthony had a significant impact on my own career at ASTRO, a seemingly innocuous moment that significantly altered my trajectory within the organization. In 2009, he notified me that the Board had selected me to be the Editor of ASTROnews, an endeavor that accorded me the opportunity to speak directly to the membership several times each year, to come into their offices and studies and to become comfortable with each other. The rest, as they say, is history. I said it then, and I’ll say it again: Thank you, Anthony.

And so, as Dr. Anthony L. Zietman stands center stage one last time, basking in that lone hot spot and taking one final bow, we rise to our feet and give him a standing ovation. There will be no encore, for there is no need for further underscoring the obvious: this was a run like no other, a run that simply could not be made better by more. Well done, Anthony, well done.