



Decanus Maximus Lives On: Joseph R. DiPalma, M.D., Ph.D.

Joseph R. DiPalma, M.D., a much-beloved professor and dean at Hahnemann University, has been involved with the school in some capacity since 1951. Students and colleagues alike consider him a tireless researcher, brilliant teacher, and adroit administrator, using the word *icon* to describe his influence and status. In recent years, Dr. DiPalma has bestowed a magnanimous gift on Drexel University College of Medicine, ensuring his legacy for future generations of doctors and scientists.



A Queens, NY native, Dr. DiPalma came to Hahnemann in 1951 as chair of the Pharmacology Department. He served in this capacity until 1968, when he became dean of the medical school and senior vice president for academic affairs. He “retired” in 1982, but continued to serve as associate dean for continuing education and affiliations until 1986. Today, at 93 years of age, Dr. DiPalma still comes in to the office once or twice a week for grand rounds in the cardiology department.

Known affectionately as “The Big D,” Dr. DiPalma led Hahnemann through many institutional changes. He spearheaded fundraising along with President Cameron to construct the New College Building. He oversaw the establishment of the College of Allied Health Professions (today Drexel University’s College of Nursing and Health Professions). DiPalma also collaborated with President Shova and raised nearly \$40 million in a bond issue to build the new hospital in 1976.

Dr. DiPalma was also one of the leaders responsible for establishing a graduate school and thus garnering Hahnemann its university status. He says he never liked the semantics of “Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital,” noting, “I didn’t like that term because it made it appear like we were just a hospital medical school. So I and the rest of the faculty worked for years...to change Hahnemann Medical School to Hahnemann University of the Medical Sciences.”

Though he specialized in pharmacology, Dr. DiPalma also qualified in Internal Medicine and Cardiology. His earliest research interests were in the field of cardiology, particularly antifibrillatory drugs. He was one of the pioneering members of the Likoff Cardiovascular Institute, a groundbreaking multidisciplinary initiative. Dr. DiPalma also collaborated with Dr. Charles Bailey in his forays into open-heart surgery.

A successful teacher, researcher, administrator, and mentor, Dr. DiPalma has been known as a renaissance man for his work outside academia as well. Longtime colleague and friend Barbara Williams is quick to point out DiPalma’s skill at cultivating orchids, painting, creating new medical instruments to suit his needs, and writing. In 2004 DiPalma published *Decanus Maximus*, or “Big Dean.” Its subtitle, *The Life and Times of a Medical School Dean*, reflects his long relationship with Hahnemann. Williams says that DiPalma “was very much revered as dean.”

Everybody admires him, especially alumni.”

Dr. DiPalma’s investment in medical education will continue to be felt for generations. He recently created the DiPalma Family Endowed Chair of Cardiology Therapy at Drexel University College of Medicine as a planned gift in his will. This generous bequest is intended to provide an enduring resource to recruit the nation’s best cardiologists and pharmacologists to lead the investigative efforts into cardiovascular pharmacology at Drexel University College of Medicine.

Dr. DiPalma has received many accolades throughout his career, including the Lindback Award, an Honorary Doctor of Science degree, and the Hahnemann University Medal. The Joseph R. DiPalma Research Education Fund was also created in his honor. DiPalma’s commitment to Hahnemann University, and now Drexel University College of Medicine, is clear. “I’m very proud of Hahnemann University,” he says. “But now Drexel is in there, and Drexel is doing a good job.”

For further information on giving to the DiPalma Family Endowed Chair of Cardiology Therapy, or establishing your own fund, contact John Zabinski, vice president, Institutional Advancement at Drexel University College of Medicine: 215-255-7343 (phone) or John.J.Zabinski@drexel.edu (email).

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