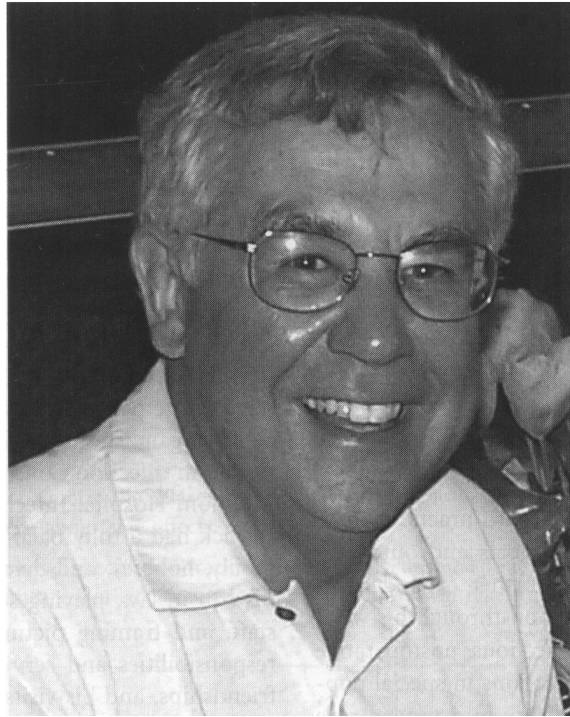


## OBITUARY

**Richard Alfred Garibaldi, MD (1942–2009)**

John P. Burke, MD; John E. McGowan, Jr, MD



Richard Alfred Garibaldi (1942–2009)

Dr Richard A. Garibaldi, a founding member of the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA) and its president in 1988, a pivotal crossroads time in SHEA history, died on September 3 of a rare form of colon cancer. Dick was a person who made a difference as he mentored and inspired others, modeled competitiveness and humility, made important contributions in a modest yet compelling way, and demanded scientific integrity and focus in all his endeavors. He was the exemplar of caring for and serving others as a clinician, educator, researcher, and administrator. A cum laude graduate of Harvard College (where he was a star baseball pitcher with a string of no-hitters) and of Dartmouth and Harvard Medical Schools, he trained in internal medicine on the Harvard Medical Service at Boston City Hospital and then

served in the Epidemic Intelligence Service under Drs Alexander Langmuir and Michael Gregg at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. He completed his training in infectious diseases and served as a faculty member at the University of Utah, returning in 1981 to his beloved New England. He then filled many important roles at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine as hospital epidemiologist, director of the Internal Medicine Residency Training Program, professor and chair of the Department of Medicine, and holder of the James E. C. Walker Endowed Chair.

Dick was first and foremost a clinician, a doctor's doctor in the literal sense who, as well as being an insightful consultant in general internal and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

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medicine, was sought out by many of his physician colleagues over the years to care for them through their own difficult illnesses. His stature as a role model for students, house officers, and faculty was recognized by the recent dedication of the Richard A. Garibaldi Humanitarianism in Medicine Award by the University of Connecticut. To the dean, Dr Peter Deckers, he became “the trusted moral conscience...bringing wisdom to the most difficult and contentious of discussions.” The dean further wrote in a memoriam, “Few people in their work and play ever become core to the very traditions of an organization—traditions that define the character and identity of that organization and make it unique and special. Richard Garibaldi rose to that level just by being who he was everyday for everyone.” He rose to that level for SHEA as well.

Dick’s career was shaped by his experience in the Epidemic Intelligence Service program at CDC in 1969–1971, where he joined a cadre of physicians who were plunged into shoe leather epidemiology in dramatic fashion; great opportunities were entrusted to young physicians early in their careers, and Dick made the most of those opportunities—a lifelong theme. His talent was recognized immediately, and he became chief of the hepatitis surveillance unit at a time when the hepatitis B surface antigen was first being studied. Dick published 10 papers from his 2-year stint, an extraordinary accomplishment, and described the first well-documented outbreak of the nonparenteral spread of hepatitis B.

His experiences at CDC drew him toward practical problems and projects with clearly defined goals and outcomes capable of achievement. At Utah, he further expanded his interests in healthcare-associated infection through his work on catheter-associated urinary tract infections, postoperative infections in surgical patients, and infections in special populations such as elderly persons and those in extended care facilities. In each of these areas, he developed objective, quantitative definitions and conducted prospective randomized clinical trials in large populations to evaluate risk factors and preventive methods for procedure-related infections—both were pioneering concepts at a time when the uses of computers for clinical investigation were first being explored—and he authored 2 of the first successful National Institutes of Health grants specifically for study of healthcare-associated infections. A news report from the 1973 ICAAC (Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy) described his first presentation at an ICAAC meeting

as “one of the most ambitious undertakings described at the meeting.”

His early investigations that focused on process errors in health care as causes of infection may now be recognized as direct antecedents of current ideas about healthcare reform through use of electronic records, error avoidance, reduced numbers of adverse events, and increased patient safety. His editorial in 1998 in *The New England Journal of Medicine* carried his message with the title “Computers and the Quality of Care—A Clinician’s Perspective.”

Dr Garibaldi’s achievements as president of SHEA reflect the efforts of many but also owe as much to his wise, constructive judgment and his skills for getting people to work together. A list of the accomplishments during his presidency include planning SHEA’s first national meeting in Baltimore in 1989; the first formal association of SHEA with the journal *Infection Control*, later renamed *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology* (to recognize the broader interests in patient safety that he emphasized in his commentary at the Baltimore meeting); and the first strategic planning meeting designed to achieve financial stability and professional management for SHEA. His initiatives included making the SHEA-CDC training course an annual event, expanding SHEA’s international activities, and strengthening SHEA’s liaisons with other organizations, especially the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology and the United Kingdom Hospital Infection Society.

Dick had a fully balanced life, with a devoted and loving family, hobbies, and diversions—tying flies, fly fishing with his son-in-law, playing softball with the Connecticut house staff, and framing pictures. He found time also for social responsibilities and service to those in need. He treasured friendships, and his visits to Cape Cod in the summers with his wife, Lorraine, and their family of 4 children, 9 grandchildren, and in-laws drew old and new colleagues with them to continue warm, joyful activities and adventures for many years. He was a man of honor, candor, sensitivity, and gentleness. Dick always focused on the human dimension of problem solving and on recognizing the individual strengths of team members. An outstanding characteristic was his ability to say just the right thing or to provide just the right bit of advice, to accomplish academic goals or to achieve consensus and move things along to where they should go. He will be missed—although we will still hear him offer us the quiet advice: “Go for it.”