

Marie-France Demierre, M.D.



March 6, 1967- April 13, 2010

Updates from the Chair

April, 2010

Rhoda M. Alani, MD

Herbert Mescon Professor and Chair



Dear Colleagues:

It is with a heavy heart that I write this issue of our monthly newsletter dedicated to the memory of our dear friend and colleague, Marie-France Demierre. As many of you already know, Dr. Demierre passed away on April 13th after a sudden and unexpected illness. Marie-France Demierre was a highly regarded clinician, researcher, teacher, mentor, colleague and friend. Her colleagues and patients held her in the highest esteem. She will be remembered for her enthusiasm, open-mindedness, spirit of volunteerism, and loyalty to her family, friends, institutions, and always to her patients.

Dr. Demierre was internationally recognized for her clinical expertise in the management of melanoma and CTCL. She worked at the forefront, participating in numerous multicenter trials of new therapies for advanced melanoma and for CTCL. She was especially dedicated to melanoma prevention and public education regarding safe sun practices, as well as to patient quality of life, writing and lecturing extensively on these topics. For many years, she led the BUMC Annual Skin Cancer Screening and volunteered for the annual screening of the Boston Red Sox, where she discovered numerous early malignancies and unquestionably saved lives. She also testified repeatedly before the Massachusetts Legislature in favor of stricter regulations for the indoor tanning industry and helped document the increase in melanomas among young women who had used tanning beds. She pioneered educational programs for mothers of newborns and young children regarding life-long risks of unprotected sun exposure. In 2009, Dr. Demierre was honored for her efforts in raising awareness of sun safety, skin cancer and melanomas with the President's Award from the Women's Dermatologic Society. She also was honored in 2009 by the Boston Red Sox as a Medical All Star

for her tireless community work promoting sun safety awareness and education to children, teens and their parents.

I know that you join me in sending deepest sympathies to her husband and children. Please keep her in your memory and her family, colleagues and friends in your thoughts and prayers.

Carol Williams

I came to Boston Medical Center 10 years ago with no background in the clinical setting. I worked as a Home Health Aid for 15 years taking care of the elderly and thought I had had enough of the health field so I left and went to work at the Stride Rite Corporation (a children's shoe company). I worked there for 5 years and knew that my calling in life was to do all I could to help the sick, so I left Stride Rite and came to work for Dr. Demierre.

I don't have to tell you what type of person Dr. Demierre was because in speaking to each of you these past 2 weeks, I have heard the similar themes from all of you. We all know how dedicated she was and how much she cared for her patients and how much they cared for her. She took the time to know each and every one of them personally. She would walk into the room to see her patients and started out with "My Dear _____ how are you?" All you had to do was say a patient's name and she could tell you everything about him or her.

I have been asked what drove her to always be in a rush and my answer is that she felt she had so much to accomplish and so little time to do it all. She would often tell me that there were not enough hours in the day. She walked faster than most of us could run and never slept. She would send me emails late at night and I would tell her she needed all the rest she could get with all that she did.

She would strive to bring out the best in everyone that she came in contact with. She wanted her fellows, residents, master students, and medical students to learn all that they could so one day they could be as knowledgeable as she was. She

experienced great pleasure from teaching them everything about each patient they came in contact with and made time for each of them individually.

I will always cherish the memories of her. She taught me the true meaning of hard work and the benefits from it. She also taught me perfection, sincerity, caring, love, compassion, and the list goes on. For someone so young to have accomplished as much as she did says a lot in itself.

I want to thank everyone for being so supportive to each other during this tragic loss we have all suffered. It will never be the same without her and as time goes on we will need each other to get through each day.

MY DEAR DR. DEMIERRE YOU'RE A LOVE
AND I WILL MISS YOU.

Lynne Goldberg, M.D.

After completing medical school at McGill University in 1995, Marie-France arrived at BU to do a Skin Oncology Fellowship under the direction of Dr. Howard Koh. After completion, she returned to her native country of Montreal, only to be recruited back to head the program after Dr. Koh left to become the state's public health commissioner (he is now assistant secretary for health in the US Department of Health and Human Services). For the past 13 years she has directed the Skin Oncology Service, rising to the rank of Full Professor in 2008.

To say that Marie-France had a variety of interests is an understatement. She cared for patients with melanoma and cutaneous lymphoma, ran the photopheresis program at BU, and was a teacher and mentor to medical students, dermatology residents, and her fellows. She was most proud of her collaboration with the Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation on quality of life issues for cutaneous lymphoma patients, and her work with the Southwest Oncology Group in melanoma prevention. She was very active in the Women's Dermatologic Society (WDS), and served on its board of administrators. In addition, she sat on several WDS committees, recently planned one of

their leadership retreats, and was honored with the President's Award in 2009. I do not think it would be a stretch to surmise that she was on the short list of future WDS presidential candidates.

Marie-France's personal life revolved around her family – her husband Maurizio and their two children Francoise, 12 and Christian, 9. They spent their weekdays in Cambridge, where the children were enrolled in the International School of Boston. It was very important to Marie-France to have her children attend an international school; Maurizio is Italian, she spent part of her childhood in Switzerland, and both are fluent in several languages. Marie-France and Maurizio were very active in school functions and had a vibrant social life with other school parents. In addition, Maurizio was recently nominated for and took on the role of PTO president.

Weekends were spent at the family home in Quincy. Marie-France enjoyed the outdoors, particularly the view of the ocean, and chose to live in Quincy deliberately so that she would have to drive by the water on her way to work. She liked nothing more than to bicycle or walk with friends along the shore. She was very knowledgeable about wine, and enjoyed cooking and hosting dinner parties. In the summer, life in her Quincy neighborhood of Merrymount revolved around the community park and beach, where there were frequent activities. She, Maurizio and the kids rarely missed an event.

Marie-France and I were more than just close colleagues. Our families socialized regularly, and have traveled together on several occasions. Marie-France and I enjoyed rooming together every year at the AAD, and it was just last month that we celebrated her birthday in Miami.

What I admire and respect most about Marie-France is her positivity. She lived her life to the fullest with tireless enthusiasm. I was and will continue to be inspired by her, and I know that I speak on behalf of all who knew her, personally and professionally, when I say that we have lost a great spirit.

Gary Mendese, M.D.

“Doctor Demierre!”

For those outside our inner circle at Boston Medical Center, these two short words come together just like any other first and last name. The enthusiastic and energetic intonation our beloved Dr. Demierre used when greeting patients and answering the telephone can only be appreciated by her colleagues, friends, family and patients. For her patients, “Doctor Demierre!” was a real reminder that their caregiver was ready to help them manage their complicated medical issues. For the consult resident who just dialed 8-4016, “Doctor Demierre!” was an indication that the inpatient awaiting her would be effortlessly evaluated and diagnosed in just a few short moments.

I must admit that I was initially intimidated by Dr. Demierre. Her reputation as a well-respected authority on cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) and melanoma preceded her; when I began the “BU-I Demierre” block last year I was apprehensive to say the least. Sure I could at least partially recognize psoriasis, acne and some common skin tumors at that point – but CTCL, lymphomatoid papulosis and advanced melanomas were different beasts altogether. But after spending just one day in her busy clinic filled with complex and sick patients, I realized just how approachable and down-to-earth she was. It only took a few hours to see through her well-deserved confidence and European nonchalance and understand how much she truly cared for her patients, staff, co-faculty and residents. Even as first year residents who really knew very little about dermatology, she referred to us as her colleagues.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Dr. Demierre was her ability to diagnose and treat even the most challenging presentations essentially on the spot. She often stood out at our Grand Rounds sessions as one who suggested a differential diagnosis that no one else had even considered. Sometimes there would be questioning looks from the attendees. But often times, Dr. Demierre was correct and she was revered for it.

“Let’s take it off!” Residents of the program – past and present – are certainly familiar with this Demierre-ism which was heard on almost a daily basis in her clinics. If a lesion had changed in any way per a patient’s history, or if she was even slightly uncomfortable with its appearance, one of my favorite expressions would ensue: “I’m going to leave the honors to my colleague!” I think we can all agree that many melanomas were identified because of her aggressive style and I hope we’ll always keep this in the forefront of our minds.

On the wards, Dr. Demierre was absolutely amazing. I think it was during this experience that we residents truly grew to appreciate her skills as a clinician. Be it one or five consults in an afternoon, simple folliculitis or erythroderma, each was a true learning experience and almost every patient was exciting and “fascinating!” She genuinely cared about both the patients and the resident’s understanding of the disease process, and it showed each and every time the yellow card was stamped. She often referred the resident to the literature and/or texts and there was frequently a welcomed banter that will be sadly missed but always remembered.

But despite Dr. Demierre’s academic prowess, she was still human. We will always remember her little quirks. For instance, it was well-known that in Dr. Demierre’s clinic, every possible room in the clinic needed to be filled with a patient and the waiting room left empty. Logistically it was virtually impossible and this essentially never happened; but three days per week, the staff and residents alike knew this was on the top of her priority list. Also, it was not uncommon to see Dr. Demierre gently yell, “Mrs. Jones, my dear friend!” while casting the curtain just inside the patient room door to the side, only to discover that Mr. Smith was in fact the patient we were about to see. She was never fazed when this happened and the resident always sheepishly smiled. It just made her Dr. Demierre.

Also, more than any attending, Dr. Demierre took a genuine interest in the lives of her patients, residents and staff. She knew our significant others and children by name and often inquired about them. On a personal note, we often swapped stories of

our kids and during the last two years, even though we were on completely different levels professionally, I considered Dr. Demierre a mentor and friend.

The world of dermatology changed two weeks ago when Dr. Demierre passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Those of us who knew, respected and adored her, truly appreciate the loss of such a great woman, dermatologist, physician, mother and friend. There is a hole left in the field and in our department and although it will undoubtedly be filled with time, we all understand that things will never be the same. Her memory will live on among us.

Dr. Demierre, we will never forget what you've given us and will cherish our time together always. You made the world a better place in your short time here, and you have inspired us all to achieve greatness.

À tout à l'heure.

Until we see each other again.

Angela Beckford, M.D.

On April 13th 2010 we experienced the overwhelming shock and still grieve the untimely passing of a young, energetic, enthusiastic and dedicated skin oncology specialist. Our dermatology department, BU, USCCL, lymphoma and melanoma foundations, WDS, national and international colleagues, students, patients, friends, neighbors and most importantly dear Maurizio, Françoise, Christian and other family members have suffered an irreplaceable loss. Marie-France Demierre though gone too soon had a tremendous impact on countless lives.

In the midst of all the sadness I must express my gratitude to everyone who has taken the time to ensure that we are able to cope with this crisis. Personally not a day has gone by without calls, a text message, an e-mail or someone dropping in the office to check on me and Carol. I truly feel as if I am surrounded by a supportive and caring

community here at BU reminiscent of a family. I thank a resident for offering her home to me as she was worried about me being alone. I also wish to thank the patients who I had a very tough time breaking the news to for calling back and even showing up in person to extend comfort. I had no idea of the impact that I had on their lives and feel honored and humbled when they ask if I will still be there for them on follow up visits. This leaves me with the inability to quantify how much Dr. Demierre meant to her patients.

I recall a patient on hearing about Dr. Demierre's passing describe how her life was completely changed after her first visit to BMC. She had been to many dermatologists before and was suffering terribly with pruritus, unsightly lesions and fatigue. She was welcomed to the VIP club with a hug; a definitive diagnosis and medication helped to optimize her quality of life. There are numerous such cases as Dr. Demierre was a fierce physician who never gave up on the most challenging of cases; she would always go the extra mile to ensure the best care.

We will miss her as the life of every party, the twinkle in her eyes when she was given chocolate, when asked about wine, saw someone wearing pink, received a "fascinoma" consult or thought a colleague saved a life. Marie-France was passionate and excited about everything and every day in life which she no doubt lived to the fullest. In reflection, her accomplishments both academic and otherwise extend way beyond 43 years.

I thank her first of all for having seen the potential in me as the "skin oncology fellow" at BMC. Her tireless energy, much like the energizer bunny often had me feeling like I was hanging on to a swaying quickly moving truck on the highway, but as one resident said, "you held on tightly." In doing so I gained a wealth of clinical experience, as well as knowledge and confidence in the management of cutaneous lymphoma patients. Thank you for being instrumental in the opportunity to further my career in dermatology. For this I am grateful. Your clinical guidance is missed. *Reste dans la paix.*

Lectures/Presentations

Vulvar Melanoma: Chart Review and Physician Survey, 42nd Mohs College Meeting, NYC April 30, 2010 Krathen MS, **Demierre MF**, Hefner L, Loo D

For those of you who would like to share your thoughts with Dr. Demierre's Family, please visit:

<http://www.legacy.com/gb2/default.aspx?bookid=5291541547664&cid=full>

For donations to the Marie-France Demierre Family Fund or Skin Oncology Fund, please visit:

<http://www.bumc.bu.edu/derm/>

At this time, we are all reminded of the fragility of life and the precious time we have on earth. I hope you will strive to live every minute to its fullest the way Marie-France Demierre did, enjoy all of the goodness you have in your life, and keep the memory of our wonderful colleague and friend with you always.

Warmest regards,

Rhoda

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY/JUNE 2010

GRAND ROUNDS

PLACE: DOCTORS OFFICE BUILDING, 9TH FLOOR

DATE/TIME: WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 8:30-11:45 AM

LECTURE: "What I learned from patch testing" by Dr. Vince DeLeo

SPECIAL FACULTY MEETING

PLACE: 609 ALBANY STREET, 4TH FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM

DATE/TIME: WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 12:00 – 1:00 PM

TRAINEE GRADUATION

PLACE: BU SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, 595 COMM AVE

DATE/TIME: WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 5:30 – 10:30 PM

GRAND ROUNDS

PLACE: DOCTORS OFFICE BUILDING, 9TH FLOOR

DATE/TIME: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 8:30-11:45 AM

FIRST ANNUAL G. ROBERT BALER LECTURE

PLACE: FGH CONFERENCE ROOM, 1ST FLOOR

DATE/TIME: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 11:00 – 12:00

LECTURE: "My Six Decades in Dermatology" by Dr. G. Robert Baler Lunch to follow (12:00 – 1:30)



