

Memorial Resolution

Brian S. Decker, M.D., PharmD.
School of Medicine

Brian S. Decker, M.D., PharmD., an internationally renowned physician and researcher who transformed care of individuals with chronic kidney disease by focusing on pharmacology to make medications safer and more effective, died on June 6, 2018 at Methodist hospital surrounded by his family and friends. He was 54.

Dr. Decker was diagnosed two years ago with a high-grade sarcoma, a cancer that started in his muscle. Ever the teacher, he shared his personal experience with the disease to the School of Medicine community, promoting personalized medicine by explaining how knowing more about the tumor can help direct chemotherapy choices.

Dr. Decker graduated from Purdue University with a BS in Biologic Sciences and a Doctorate of Pharmacy. He then graduated from Medical School at Indiana University, spending the first two years of his training at the Lafayette campus. He completed a residency in Internal Medicine, Chief Residency in Internal Medicine at Wishard hospital, and Nephrology fellowship at Indiana University. During his third year of fellowship, he was on a NIH training grant.

Dr. Decker became a faculty member at Indiana University in the Division of Nephrology, Department of Medicine in 2007. During his early years, he completed his Master's Degree in Clinical Research through the Indiana Clinical Trials Science Institute. He was Board Certification in Internal Medicine, Nephrology and Clinical Pharmacology, and received Clinical Certification from the American Society of Hypertension. He also became a Certified Physician Investigator through the Academy of Clinical Research Professionals. He believed in, and set an example for, lifelong learning.

Dr. Decker was a leader in the field of renal pharmacology. He helped many patients because of his knowledge of both pharmacology and pharmacogenomics, minimizing adverse drug reactions and ensuring appropriately dose medications. Dr. Decker was an exemplary physician, always caring, empathetic, and thoughtful with a strong knowledge of all aspects of internal medicine. One patient said "Dr. Decker has been there anytime I needed him to be". Another patient said "Dr. Decker is as fine a doctor as you could find anywhere. He goes above and beyond what one would expect". Finally "Dr. Decker is one of the best physicians I have dealt with. Very professional, personable, knowledgeable, and treats me like family".

Dr. Decker was a campus leader in research in personalized medicine and pharmacogenomics, understanding how an individual's genes affect his or her response to drugs. He was active in the NIH Ingenious trial at Eskenazi Hospital to determine how physicians incorporated pharmacogenomics results into their daily practice of medicine. Dr. Todd Skaar, Principle Investigator of the study said "His vast knowledge of pharmacology and genetics, willingness to work together, and efforts to educate both us and the community were absolutely key to the success of this trial. We miss him, dearly!"

He was the Director of the Phase I clinical research unit in the Indiana Clinical Research Center, Indiana Clinical Translational Science Institute. He was the inaugural director of the Phase I unit and helped to develop contracts and collaborations with Eli Lilly and Covance companies. Dr. Scott Denne, Director of

the Indiana Clinical Research Center said “Brian’s expertise, energy, and great ability to collaborate were key to establishing the Phase 1 unit, and making it a success”.

Dr. Decker was collaborative in his research, working with Professors in the School of Pharmacy, School of Nursing, and School of Medicine. He had research projects related to how the liver handled medications, how to improve patient adherence with ‘smart phone’ pill bottles, and how underlying genetics can affect response to medications given to patients. A research collaborator of Dr. Decker noted “In addition to being a collaborator, he was a friend and mentor and approached his work always with a positive-attitude, purpose and persistence - and has left an indelible mark. He will be missed.” Dr. Decker was funded by the National Institutes of Health to conduct research. During his short life, he published over 50 papers, textbook chapters, and guidelines.

Dr. Decker was involved in multiple national committees: As a member of Extracorporeal Treatment in Poisonings (EXTRIP) group, he developed and published multiple consensus statements/guidelines on the removal of drugs and poisons by dialysis. As a member of the Clinical Pharmacogenetic Implementation Consortium (CPIC) he was involved in developing dosing guidelines for the anti-rejection drug tacrolimus in patients with specific genetic polymorphisms in drug metabolizing cytochromes. As a member of the Kidney Disease Improving Global Outcomes, he was a leader in developing drug-dosing guidelines for patients with chronic kidney disease. As a member of the National Board of Medical Examiners Pharmacology and Biochemistry Test Committee, he developed test questions for USMLE Step 1 and 3 exams.

Dr. Decker was active in the Professional Society the American College of Clinical Pharmacology, serving on the education committee. He conducted educational seminars, worked on clinical practice guidelines, and volunteered in many ways. The Director of the Professional Society wrote, “Always the teacher and champion of Clinical Pharmacology, Brian never told us he was sick. He just kept doing what he loved doing for the American College of Clinical Pharmacology and in promoting the use of clinical pharmacology to enhance the practice of medicine and patient’s lives. The gap caused by his absence, and our sorrow, are both profound.”

Dr. Decker loved education. Throughout his medical career, he mentored learners at all levels and served on the School of Medicine Academy of Teaching Scholars Committee and the Faculty Learning Community. Dr. Decker enthusiastically taught courses for both the School of Medicine and the Purdue School of Pharmacy on pharmacology, pharmacogenomics, chronic kidney disease, and hypertension management. His goal was to ensure every physician understood how to appropriately prescribe medications.

Dr. Decker was very active in teaching medical students. He taught physical diagnosis and was a student mentor for medical students. He taught team based learning for students on topics such as hypertension, pharmacology and chronic kidney disease. He gave monthly lectures to third year medical students on chronic kidney disease. He organized and taught the Nephrology and Pharmacology cores for the 4th year medical student elective Clinical Therapeutics. He started and fostered a student interest group in Nephrology.

Dr. Decker was instrumental in the education of Nephrology fellows. He served on the Education and Fellowship Committee for the Division of Nephrology, then the Program Evaluation and Clinical Competency Committees for the Nephrology Fellowship. In 2015, he took on the role of Nephrology Fellowship Director. He was loved and respected by Nephrology Fellow Trainees. One Nephrology fellow noted that he was “dedicated and empathetic to others when they had things to share and say”.

Another said, "He instilled within me, that our patients fuel our passion to heal, and this passion will fuel the future of nephrology. He exemplified for me, the doctor I strive to become."

Dr. Decker was also active in working as the scholastic mentor for several fellows involved in the Pharmacogenetics Fellowship. In this role he worked with fellows from pediatrics and internal medicine. Dr. Michelle S. Howenstine, Assistant Dean for Graduate Medical Education for the IU School of Medicine noted, "Dr. Decker was an excellent Program Director that served both as an educational leader in Internal Medicine, Nephrology, and Clinical Pharmacology, and as a professional role model for the trainees".

Dr. Decker was talented in multiple aspects of academic medicine. He was, in actuality, an expert in all the so-called triple threat with outstanding skills and productivity in all missions: education, patient care, and research. He not only was successful in what he did, but how he accomplished all that he did. Dr. Sharon Moe, Division Chief of Nephrology in the School of Medicine reflects: "He always loved teaching and mentoring and fostered the potential for excellence in everyone. He was a great friend to many, and selfless in his volunteerism. He will be deeply missed".

Dr. Decker's organizational, leadership, and mentoring skills extended outside of the IU School of Medicine where he served as President of the Board of Directors for the National Kidney Foundation of Indiana, a Head Scoutmaster for Boy Scout troop 56, and as an instructor and 2nd degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do.

Above all, Dr. Decker was a loving husband and father. He is survived by his wife of 23 years Peggy, and his two sons Scotty and Noah. He is also survived by his sisters Jan (Dean) Johnson and Joy (Richard) LeBaron, sister-in law Melissa (TJ) Raffelock, mother in law Mary Tull and numerous nieces and nephews. In honor of Dr. Decker's accomplishments, we have established a fund in the IU Foundation to support lectures in medical education and pharmacology.

By any measure, Brian Decker was a remarkable success, and a remarkable human being.