In Memoriam Tribute to Dusan Z. Kocovic, MD

Dr Dusan Kocovic died on September 26, 2014 at the Lankenau Medical Center at the age of 56, after a long and heroic battle with metastatic colon cancer.

Dr Kocovic attended the Belgrade University Medical School from 1976 to 1982 in Yugoslavia and completed his general medicine residency at the University Clinical Center, Belgrade. He developed an interest in the study of cardiac arrhythmias early in his career and took time during his residency training to pursue research fellowships at the Hospital Jean Rostand Electrophysiology Laboratory in Paris, and the San Antonius Hospital Electrophysiology Laboratory in the Netherlands. In 1991, Dr Kocovic came to the United States where he completed his cardiology and cardiac electrophysiology training at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. Dusan regarded his time with Dr Bernard Lown as particularly important in his development, providing him with a humanistic approach to patients with complex rhythm disorders.

Following his training, Dr Kocovic joined the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania where he served as Director of the Electrophysiology Laboratory from 1995 to 2002. He joined the staff of the Lankenau Medical Center as director of the Lankenau Electrophysiology Laboratory and also as the Mainline Health System Director of Electrophysiology Services.

Dr Kocovic was an expert in ablation of atrial fibrillation and ventricular tachycardia. He trained with and was close friends with Dr William Stevenson and they shared many projects and difficult cases. Dr Kocovic was probably best known for his work in biventricular pacing. He was an early pioneer in cardiac resynchronization, and authored several publications as the technique matured. Until his death, he continued his research aimed to optimize outcomes for his patients.

Dr Kocovic engineered the expansion of cardiac arrhythmia services across Mainline Health’s four acute care hospitals, bringing state-of-the-art technology to the health system. Dr Kocovic was an expert consultant who cared for thousands of patients. He was the “gentle giant” revered by his colleagues and staff for his kindness and consideration as he treated patients with complex rhythm problems. Dr Kocovic was also a “go to guy” when it came to catheter ablation for patients with complex arrhythmias. His in-depth knowledge of cardiac electrophysiology and his ability to apply fundamental principles to solve complex problems in the clinical laboratory was remarkable.

Dr Kocovic lectured extensively throughout the world and was awarded an honorary membership in the Russian Society of Clinical Electrophysiology and Cardiac Pacing. He authored or co-authored over 50 publications and a dozen book chapters and led several clinical trials that advanced our discipline.

During his years at the University of Pennsylvania and the Lankenau Medical Center, Dr Kocovic was highly involved in teaching medical students, residents, cardiology fellows, and physicians in practice. Perhaps his greatest legacy is the cadre of fellows he trained to specialize in the field of cardiac electrophysiology. His trainees looked upon him as both a valued friend and a trusted advisor. Many returned from around the country as he lay dying, to tell him one last time how much they appreciated his tutelage.

Dr Kocovic is survived by his wife, Biljana, and his two children, Jelena and Nikola, who are pursuing careers in health care. He will also be remembered fondly by all of the people with whom he worked from janitors and maintenance staff, to administrations, physicians, department directors, and industry representatives. All of us will remember his smile, his friendly persona, and his engaging demeanor.

Our loss is staggering on many different levels, but perhaps most tragic is that we and future physicians will no longer have the opportunity to witness his example of incorporating the compassionate, humanistic side of medicine into technologically sophisticated care for his patients.

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