AUR Gold Medalist Tribute

Ronald L. Arenson, MD

Introduction by Stanley Baum, MD

For most of his career, Ronald L. Arenson, MD, focused his research on the applications of computer technology to imaging, as well as promoting the basic science and clinical excellence of radiology. Even while he was earning his undergraduate degree in mathematics at Duke University, he worked as a systems engineer at IBM; and as a medical student at New York College of Medicine, he was a computer consultant at Beth Israel Medical Center. He began his residency at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in 1971 and, during his training, also worked in the MGH Laboratory of Computer Science. While in the U.S. Navy (1974–1976), he was the Navy representative to the Tri-military Medical Information Systems (TRIMIS) and served as the chair, Department of Radiology, National Naval Medical Center (Bethesda, MD).

I first met Ron when he was a resident at MGH, and the smartest thing I ever did was to recruit him to the University of Pennsylvania in 1976 after he finished his service in the Navy. His outstanding talents were quickly recognized at Penn, and within 6 years, he was promoted to professor of radiology. From 1988 to 1991, he served as the vice provost for information systems and computing at Penn, as well as being vice chair of the department of radiology.

It would be an understatement to say that Ron was always ahead of the curve. Twenty-seven years ago, he transmitted live images from our magnetic resonance (MR) imager at Penn to the 1985 annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), and the satellite dish he installed is still in place.

Since 1992, Ron has served as the Alexander R. Margulis Distinguished Professor and chair of the Department of Radiology and Biomedical Imaging, University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). Under his leadership, the department has grown and maintained its status as the flagship of American academic radiology. Perhaps his greatest recent contribution to research at UCSF was the creation of the Center for Functional and Molecular Imaging at China Basin Landing in San Francisco. This facility and the faculty working there are propelling the next frontier in molecular imaging. When the center opened its doors, 140 faculty, staff, and students moved in to continue to expand on their excellent research programs. In addition to the 50,000-sq. ft. research facility, Dr Arenson also opened an advanced clinical facility with computed tomography and MR imaging at China Basin. Both the research and clinical spaces were recently expanded.

On the national scene, Dr Arenson has been working on establishing research training in the residency program and recently achieved a major breakthrough with the Radiology Review Committee (RRC). The RRC has now agreed to include language such as “All residents need training in critical thinking, outcomes research, and decision analysis.” In addition, Dr Arenson has changed the posture at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in particular at the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB), which now allows 1-year research fellowships during residency or combined with a clinical fellowship. Ron organized the RAD13, a group of the chairs of the leading research departments across the country that strongly agree that the future of academic radiology depends on engaging trainees early in research. He has served on the Council of the NIH’s NIBIB and on the NIH Council of Councils, which was recently created by the director of the NIH.

Dr Arenson has been conducting surveys and analysis with regard to academic radiologists’ workload and productivity for many years. These productivity surveys are used by chairs all across the country to determine staffing needs, as well as incentives for clinical work.

Ron has authored or coauthored hundreds of peer-reviewed publications and reviews. He has been the principal investigator of more than a dozen NIH grants.

Ron continues to explore cost-effectiveness studies with regard to the use of technology to change physician work flow, including speech recognition, picture archiving and communication systems (PACS), digital teaching files, and implementation of concepts from Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise (IHE®). As chair of the RSNA Electronic Communications Committee, Ron provided leadership for the IHE® initiative, and he was appointed to the RSNA Board of Directors in 2007. Ron has held leadership positions in almost every national and international radiology organization, including the International Society for Strategic Studies in Radiology.

Ron has been an AUR member since 1976 and has held all of the leadership positions in our organization, including president (2007–2008) and chair of the board of the GE Radiology Research Academic Fellowship (GERRAF) program (2004–2012).

Ron attributes much of his success to the constant support of his wife, Ellen, and their three wonderful children, Elizabeth, Catherine, and Jon. He and Ellen are also the proud grandparents of future Duke undergraduates Jack and Thomas.

It is with great pleasure that the AUR bestows its highest honor, the Gold Medal, upon Ronald L. Arenson, MD, for his outstanding contributions to the research and clinical science of imaging, as well as to the AUR. One cannot think of a more deserving recipient.