Leonard Mermel*

**How did You Get Interested in Science?**

As a child growing up in LA, my interest in science was sparked by a most wonderful grade school science teacher John Phipps. As it turns out, Mr. Phipps was Brown University graduate. Mr. Phipps often came to school early and played basketball with us. In class, he pushed us beyond the level of most kids our age giving us an understanding of the scientific method, the underpinnings of evolutionary science and more. After school, he had a program for kids interested in science where again he pushed us to think about new ideas, how to design experiments, etc. We kept in touch for many years. When I would return home from college, he would let me give some lectures in summer school classes on invertebrate zoology which was my undergraduate interest. As with so many professionals, we owe a great deal to passionate teachers who had high expectations and who motivated us in ways we would only appreciate later in life.

**Where did You Perform Your Internship/Residency and What Field of Specialization did You Choose and Who were Your Mentors?**

I did a rotating internship at Phoenix General Hospital, I then did my internal medicine internship/residency at St. Louis University Hospitals where I was fortunate to again have a few wonderful mentors such as Joseph D. Sapira, MD, who authored a most eclectic authoritative text entitled The Art & Science of Bedside Diagnosis. I was also fortunate to have some wonderful co-chief residents, one of whom is Ronald M. Wyatt MD, MHA, Medical Director, Division of Healthcare Improvement, The Joint Commission and who remains a close friend to this day.

I did my fellowship in infectious diseases at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals where I had some spectacular attending physicians who left an indelible imprint on my practice of infectious diseases today. My research mentor was Dennis G. Maki with whom I was also fortunate to round with on the ID consult service. Dennis is an unmistakably brilliant individual who’s clinical acumen is without equal and who has an uncanny, insightful ability to ask research questions that have a tremendous impact on day to day medical practice. He has forever set the bar very high for me and others who have followed in his large footsteps.

**Did You have a Particular Career Wish as a Child and were There Any People Who Influenced Your Decision?**

I distinctly remember the first time I wanted to become a physician. My maternal grandmother had a major role in my childhood. When I was 10 or 11 y old, she had an MI. Visiting her in her hospital room, I wanted her to get better but I remember feeling helpless in this regard and telling my mother that I wanted to be a doctor to help my grandmother and to help others.

**Tell us About Your Early Days and What Advice Would You have to Junior People Entering the Field**

Although founded in 1863, when I came to Rhode Island Hospital in 1991, I
was the first full-time Rhode Island Hospital-based adult ID trained faculty member and the first hospital epidemiologist at this institution. Those early days were a profound struggle, establishing my research program, sharing responsibilities for the clinical ID consult service and having a young family. Most fortunately, my wife Debra helped tremendously in child rearing to make up for the innumerable hours I spent at the hospital those days. During my residency in St. Louis and fellowship in Wisconsin, my wife would often bring the kids to the hospital to have dinner with me. Once here as an attending physician, I made it a point to go to my children’s events more than I can remember, be it karate demonstrations, baseball, soccer, track, etc. My advice for junior faculty members is to always strive for a sense of balance between work and home life. Never lose sight of the obligations you have to your spouse, children, parents, siblings, etc and remain true to yourself.

What was Your Most Significant Scientific Accomplishment?

I will leave it for others to gauge my most significant accomplishments. A few of the articles that were important in moving the field forward were: 1) Mermel LA, Maki DG. Detection of bacteremia in adults. Consequences of culturing an inadequate volume of blood. Ann Intern Med 119:270–272, 1993. Two) Mermel LA. Prevention of intravascular catheter-related infections. Ann Intern Med 132:391–402, 2000.; 3) Dietrich DW, Auld DB, Mermel LA. Community-acquired methicillin-resistant Staphyloccoccus aureus in southern New England children. Pediatrics 113:e346–e351, 2004; 4) Ben-David D, Novikov I, Mermel LA. Are there differences in hospital cost between patients with nosocomial methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus bloodstream infection and methicillin-susceptible S. aureus bloodstream infections? Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol 30:453–460, 2009; 5) Asad S, Sweeney J, Mermel LA. Transfusion-transmitted babesiosis in Rhode Island. Transfusion 49:2564–2573, 2009; 6) Kassakian SZ, Mermel LA, Jefferson JA, Parenteau SL, Machan JT. Impact of chlorhexidine bathing on hospital-acquired infections in general medical patients. Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol 32:238–243, 2011; 7) Mermel LA, Machan JT, Parenteau S. Seasonality of MRSA infections. PLOS ONE 6 (3):e17925, 2011; 8) Trinh TT, Chan PA, Edwards O, Hollenbeck B, Huang B, Burdick N, Jefferson JA, Mermel LA. Peripheral venous catheter-related Staphylococcus aureus bacteremia. Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol 32:579–583, 2011; 9) Mermel LA, Jefferson J, Blanchard K, Parenteau S, Mathis B, Chapin K, Machan JT. Reducing Clostridium difficile incidence, colectomies, and crude mortality in the hospital setting: a successful multi-disciplinary approach. Jt Comm J Qual Patient Saf 39:398–405, 2013; 10) Fisman D, Patrozou E, Carmeli Y, Perencevich E, Tuve AR, Mermel LA,
and the Geographical Variability of Bacteremia Study Group. Geographical variability in the likelihood of bloodstream infections due to gram–negative bacteria: correlation with proximity to the equator and health care expenditure. PLOS ONE 9(12): e114548, 2014.

About Leonard Mermel Dr. Mermel received his undergraduate education at University of Colorado, Boulder (BA, 1978) and graduate education at Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene & Public Health (ScM, 1980), and University of Osteopathic Medicine and Health Sciences (DO, 1984). He did a rotating internship at Phoenix General Hospital, Arizona (1984–5), internal medicine residency and chief residency at St. Louis University Hospitals, Missouri (1985–8), and infectious diseases fellowship at University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics, Wisconsin (1988–90), where he held his first academic position as Clinical Instructor of Medicine (1990–1). Since 1991, Dr. Mermel has been affiliated with The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where he is a Professor of Medicine. In addition, he is attending physician in the Division of Infectious Diseases and Medical Director of Department of Epidemiology & Infection Control, Rhode Island Hospital. His main research interests are the pathogenesis, epidemiology, and prevention of hospital-acquired and community-acquired infections, especially intravascular catheter-related infections. Dr. Mermel has co-authored more than 170 papers and book chapters on hospital epidemiology, multi-drug resistant pathogens, bloodstream infections and others. He is a Fellow of American College of Physicians, Infectious Diseases Society of America, and Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA; 2005 President), and a recipient of multiple honors and awards including Ralph A. Kinsella, Sr. Memorial Tribute Award (1988), SHEA Young Investigator Award (1997), Honorary Master of Arts, Brown University (1998), SHEA Mentor Scholar Award (2014) and multiple teaching awards.