IN MEMORIAM

Bernard T. Engel, PhD
April 18, 1928–September 22, 2017

Dr. Bernard T. Engel died peacefully at age 89 with his family at his side on September 22, 2017, after a year-long decline from pancreatic cancer.

After serving two years in the U.S. Army after the Korean War, Bernie received his PhD in psychology at UCLA in 1956, which launched his 40-year career in the field of psychosomatic medicine. His mentors at UCLA were interested in how the yoga practitioners in India could control visceral functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, and respirations during meditative practice. At the same time, luminary work on operant conditioning and the psychology of learning was being described by leaders in the field such as B. F. Skinner in the 1940s. Bernie merged these two fields of study and was one of the first scientists to publish in the new field of biofeedback.

Over the ensuing decades, he published over 150 scientific articles and book chapters on biofeedback, both in clinical medicine and physiologic basic science. Most of his work was conducted from 1967 to his retirement in 1996 while serving as a Laboratory Chief at the Gerontology Research Center of the National Institute of Aging, a branch of the National Institute of Health, in Baltimore, MD. He served as president of professional societies, and received many national and international honors including a recognition from U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop in 1987.

Bernie’s research revealed pathways for people to learn how to control functions such as heart rate and blood pressure when they were provided feedback on their voluntary control of these functions. “Visceral learning” as Bernie called it, could be applied to many bodily functions previously viewed as autonomic. He is best known for work on teaching patients with certain forms of bladder and bowel incontinence to control these symptoms; his methods remain the treatment of choice.

Bernie was predeceased by his wife Rae (nee Goldberg) after 59 years of marriage. He is survived by his daughters Sandra Cocke (William) of Washington, DC, and Lauren Miller of Dallas, TX, and son, Jeffrey Engel (Susan Ehrlich) of Raleigh, NC. He is also survived by his seven grandchildren—Erin, Leah, Benjamin, Hannah, Sophie, Alexander, and Nicholas—and four great-grandchildren—Elina, Nolan, Ione, and August.

Contributions may be made in Bernie’s memory to Beth Mayer Synagogue in Raleigh, NC.