

In Memoriam C. Warren Olanow (1941–2024)



The sudden death on October 25, 2024 of C. Warren Olanow produced an outpouring of grief by his many friends and colleagues in the International Parkinson and Movement Disorder Society (MDS), and movement disorder world in general. Accompanying the sadness, however, was a sense of gratitude from those whose personal and professional lives he touched and selflessly supported.

Many of Warren's academic achievements are described in detail in the accompanying obituary, in this issue of the *Journal*, from his longstanding close friends and collaborators José Obeso, Anthony Schapira and Fabrizio Stocchi. After attending medical school at the University of Toronto, he completed his neurology residency at the New York Neurological Institute at Columbia University. Warren's interest in Parkinson's disease was influenced by Melvin Yahr and Roger Duvoisin, as well as Stanley Fahn, who had just returned to Columbia around that time. After further post-doctoral work on the basal ganglia at Columbia with the leading neuroanatomist, Malcolm Carpenter, Warren secured his first faculty position at McGill University and the Montreal Neurological Institute, where he taught the neuroanatomy course and set up a Parkinson's clinic.¹ He was then recruited to Duke University as Head of Clinical Neurology. At first, his major interests were in both myasthenia gravis and Parkinson's disease, but he settled on a career focusing on movement disorders. Collaborative work with Burton Drayer, who discovered that excessive brain iron led to characteristic MRI changes, stirred an interest in laboratory science and exploring the pathophysiology of disease. He went on to pursue this as Professor of Neurology at the University of South Florida, where he helped pioneer a program in cell transplantation into the basal

ganglia as therapy for Parkinson's disease. In 1994, he became Chairman of the Department of Neurology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, where he remained until his retirement from academic medicine, and was then appointed Emeritus Professor in both the Departments of Neurology and Neuroscience. Even in academic retirement, he appeared on the 2024 Clarivate list of Highly Cited Researchers.

The Movement Disorder Society (MDS) was created in 1992 from the formal merger of the International Medical Society for Motor Disturbances (ISMD), and MODIS (the "original" Movement Disorder Society), in which Stanley Fahn was the founding President (1988–1991). Warren was the last President of the ISMD, from 1993 to 1994, and concurrently the first Treasurer of the newly merged MDS, working with his friend and colleague, C. David Marsden (dec.), who was its inaugural President from 1991 to 1994. As Treasurer, Warren played a crucial role in navigating the financial aspects of the merger of the two societies, and thus played an integral role in the birth of the MDS.²

Warren became the 7th President of the MDS, a position he held from 2003 to 2004 (Fig. 1). He played a prominent role in several key milestones in the evolution of the Society, including the change from biannual to annual International Congresses from 2004, the deliberate pivot towards publishing basic, translational and clinical science as Co-Editor with Jose Obeso of the *Movement Disorders* journal from 2010 to 2014, and in the establishment of its companion journal *Movement Disorders Clinical Practice* in 2014. For his contributions to the MDS, he received the President's Distinguished Service Award in 2007 and Honorary Membership Award in 2015.

Warren was also honored with board positions or awards from many other societies and organizations, including being a Past Treasurer of the American Neurological Association, an Honorary Member of the French Neurological Society, an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (United Kingdom), an Honorary Professor at the University of London (Royal Free Hospital), and a recipient of the Movement Disorder Research Award from the American Academy of Neurology. He served on numerous medical, scientific advisory and editorial boards including being a founding member of the Parkinson Study Group.

***Correspondence to:** Victor S. C. Fung, Department of Neurology, Westmead Hospital, Westmead NSW 2145, Australia; E-mail: victor.fung@sydney.edu.au

This article has been simultaneously co-published with *Movement Disorders* (doi:10.1002/mds.30138). The articles are identical except for minor stylistic and spelling differences in keeping with each journal's style. Either citation can be used when citing this article.

Received 13 January 2025; accepted 13 January 2025.

Published online 13 February 2025 in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com). DOI: 10.1002/mdc3.14351



Figure 1. MDS Presidents dinner at the MDS 13th International Congress of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders, Paris, France, 2009. Back row (from left): Werner Poewe, Mark Hallett, Philip Thompson. Front row (from left): Anthony Lang, Eduardo Tolosa, Warren Olanow, Joseph Jankovic, Stanley Fahn (Courtesy Cathy and Joe Jankovic, Philip Thompson).

Warren was close friends and colleagues with, and mentored and supported, a large number of the organizational and scientific leadership and members of the MDS, too many to mention comprehensively. His involvement with the birth of the MDS required him to work closely with early Presidents such as Joe Jankovic and Mark Hallett. He actively encouraged and supported future Presidents such as Anthony Lang, Philip Thompson, Matthew Stern, Christopher Goetz and David Burn early in their careers, without any anticipated benefit to himself. He nurtured the careers of MDS journal editors such as Jon Stoessl, Kailash Bhatia and Marcelo Merello, and leading clinician scientists like Karl Kieburtz and Jeff Kordower. A couple of anecdotes from his interactions with Jeff help to exemplify Warren's qualities as a mentor and person. As an unknown post-doc at the University of Rochester, Jeff was encouraged by Ira Shoulson to speak to Warren who was visiting to deliver Grand Rounds. Jeff introduced himself and told Warren that he did PD research; Warren

spontaneously prioritized time for a meeting, leading to a lifetime of collaboration. Many years later, when they were already longstanding friends and colleagues, at a brief encounter with Jeff's mother, Warren took care to use the moment to say: "Mrs. Kordower it is wonderful to meet you; you must be so proud of your son," sensing how much that would mean to her.

Warren was known for his keen intellect and incisive thinking, that was enabled by his extensive clinical and scientific knowledge. He was also known for his astute financial and negotiating skills. He was a hard taskmaster, expecting those around him to pursue excellence and achievement rigorously, with the same drive as himself. He was always willing to listen, and if he disagreed but thought your argument was reasonable (even if wrong), enjoyed a debate. He did not suffer fools gladly, but once you gained his respect, even if you had a different viewpoint from him, you became a friend, both as a sparring, but also likely a dining partner. Warren was known


for his passion not just for science, but for life, especially as a connoisseur of travel, food and wine. He had a keen sense of humor and the absurd, and a unique grin and method of laughter. At times, his grin would appear before his punchline.

Warren presented himself as a warm, big-hearted, and inclusive leader. He was careful, however, in choosing his close friendships, and these were strong and few because of his intense fidelity to his inner circle. Many of us cherish fond memories of the warm and generous hospitality extended by Warren and Mariana at their home in Rye, NY during visits to New York conducting MDS business. Nowhere was his nurturing nature, loyalty and dedication greater displayed than in his lifelong devotion to his wife Mariana, and their children and families. He spoke of them to his friends frequently and with love, and the void left by the death of Mariana in 2019 was never filled and his sadness never erased. Warren is survived by his children Edward, James, Alessandra, and Andrew, and his six grandchildren.

Warren continued his passion for life and movement disorders right up until his unexpected death. He leaves us with the lives of patients, clinicians, researchers and the MDS immeasurably richer for his contributions. Our guess is that Warren would appreciate ending his obituary with a positive message from him, his advice to those contemplating a career in movement disorders: “Go into the field, this is a great field, and I would really encourage you to go in with your heart, and to go in with passion...”¹ ■

Victor S.C. Fung PhD, FRACP,^{1,2} 


Kailash P. Bhatia MD, DM, FRCP,³ 

David J. Burn FMedSci, MD,⁴ Christopher G. Goetz MD,⁵ 

Mark Hallett MD,⁶ Joseph Jankovic MD,⁷ Karl Kieburtz MD,^{8,9}

Christine Klein MD,¹⁰ Jeffrey H. Kordower PhD,¹¹

Anthony E. Lang MD, FRCPC,¹²

Marcelo Merello MD, PhD,¹³  Matthew B. Stern MD,¹⁴

A. Jon Stoessl CM, MD, FRCPC,¹⁵

Philip D. Thompson MB, PhD, FRACP¹⁶

¹Westmead Hospital, Westmead, New South Wales, Australia,

²University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia,

³Department of Clinical and Movement Neurosciences, UCL Queen

Square Institute of Neurology, London, UK, ⁴Faculty of Medical

Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, ⁵Rush

University Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois, USA, ⁶National Institute

of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institutes of Health,

Bethesda, Maryland, USA, ⁷Baylor College of Medicine, Houston,

Texas, USA, ⁸University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester,

New York, USA, ⁹Clintrex Research Corp, Sarasota, Florida, USA,

¹⁰University of Luebeck, Luebeck, Germany, ¹¹Arizona State

University, Tempe, Arizona, USA, ¹²Toronto Western Hospital and

the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, ¹³Raúl Carrea

Institute for Neurological Research (FLENI) and Argentine National

Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), Buenos Aires,

Argentina, ¹⁴Perelman School of Medicine at the University of

Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, ¹⁵Pacific Parkinson's

Research Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver,

British Columbia, Canada, and ¹⁶The University of Adelaide,

Adelaide, New South Wales, Australia

References

1. Olanow CW. Mark Hallett interviews C. Warren Olanow. In: Hallett M, ed. *International Parkinson Disease and Movement Disorders Society YouTube Channel*; 2012.
2. Goetz CG, McWhiey A. The Movement Disorder Society and movement disorders: a modern history. *Mov Disord* 2011;26(6):939–946.

Supporting Information

Supporting information may be found in the online version of this article.

Data S1. Warren Olanow Individual Reminiscences.docx.