

Washington

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– Dr. Cesar A. Caceres

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Saw the first GRID case in Washington

When and where did the first “PWA” come into your life?

The first encounter was in early 1982. A bisexual patient, heavily into the gay fast track scene, came to my office with pneumocystis carinii pneumonia. That extremely rare pneumonia had begun to be reported in New York City in the late 70’s in patients with depressed immune systems.

What was the environment (social, political, personal, etc) around you as you responded to the demands of the epidemic?

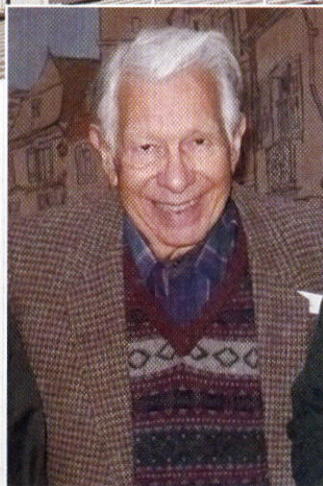
Gay patients were concerned and curious about what they had heard about in New York City. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) established significant research interest in the area. The Bethesda Naval Medical Center realized the

problem early and began testing extensively. The pharmaceutical houses had sulfa drugs for Pneumocystis. Trials began to test AZT and through many interesting lobbying techniques, AZT received an accelerated approval. Other medication followed rapidly. It was a time of exciting new developments medically.

How was your personal life affected by your work in those years?

After internship and residencies, I trained nine years to be a cardiologist. But my practice rapidly changed to HIV and the concerns of my gay patients. I had to re-start, learning the complexity of a new and devastating disease and its incredible ramifications.

In the second half of my first decade



in HIV practice, reality struck when a regular number of patients began to die weekly. The realization? AZT was not a cure and that there was more to come, without relief. This reality led me to consider leaving the medical field.

Who were your heroes during this time?

Fortunately the patients with HIV themselves had become my support system. I had witnessed the bravery of young men confronted with the lack of any prospect of survival, continuing their lives as best they could, sometimes assisted by their families and partners, some of them afflicted with HIV themselves.

Being among such heroes has been an honor that now, 29 years later, continues to be my inspiration in life. **HIV**

