



Department of Sociomedical Sciences Honors Leadership of Eugene Litwak

On March 12, the Department of Sociomedical Sciences celebrated the legacy of its third division head, Eugene Litwak, PhD. Colleagues and alumni joined Dr. Litwak to remember an era marked by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Commemorating his leadership and vision, they praised his devotion to healthcare education, research, and disease prevention.

Amy Fairchild, PhD, professor of Sociomedical Sciences, welcomed the audience. She complimented Dr. Litwak's ability to understand the connection between his role as a sociologist and his role as a sociomedical scientist. "Dr. Litwak led the Department with a robust understanding of the dynamic social and political context within which the field of public health was developing," said Dr. Fairchild.

At the start of his tenure in 1985, the Department had 27 faculty members and two MPH students. By 1996, when Dr. Litwak assumed his current role as professor emeritus and special lecturer, the faculty had almost doubled and there were 83 MPH students. He fostered growth by focusing on social science research with the intent of teaching practitioners.

Taking the podium as Dr. Litwak's colleague and friend, Peter Messeri, PhD, deputy department chair and professor of clinical Sociomedical Sciences, reflected on his capacity to manage and direct the Department with great insight. "Dr. Litwak practiced transparency and encouraged faculty engagement in all aspects of the Department." Dr. Messeri continued, remarking on Dr. Litwak's commitment to interdisciplinary work and focus on promoting health. "As a leader and researcher, Dr. Litwak has constantly prioritized health promotion and disease prevention."

Dr. Litwak is known for his research relating to social support for the elderly, HIV early intervention programs, and HIV in women.

Said Ronald Bayer, PhD, professor of Sociomedical Sciences, "Dr. Litwak led at a time when the Department could have been called the Department of AIDS Studies. AIDS forced us to confront the issues of public health policy." Dr. Bayer noted that within an environment constantly changing as the epidemic grew, Dr. Litwak created an intellectual home for a diverse group of faculty.

Robert Fullilove, EdD, associate dean of Community and Minority Affairs, and professor of clinical Sociomedical Sciences, echoed the appreciation of Dr. Litwak's interdisciplinary

approach to health promotion and disease prevention, with special focus on Dr. Litwak's capacity to make connections between the lives of students, the curriculum, and work in the field.

Additional speakers included Marysol Asencio, DrPH, associate professor of Human Development and Family Studies and Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, University of Connecticut; Nancy VanDevanter, DrPH, associate professor, New York University College of Nursing; and Ilan Meyer, PhD, associate professor of clinical Sociomedical Sciences.

For a more information and photos, please visit:
www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/sph/sms/celebratesms/events/events_litwak.html.