

Michael S. Aldrich, MD (1949-2000)

Michael S. Aldrich, MD, Professor of Neurology and Director of the Sleep Disorders Program at the University of Michigan, died on July 18, 2000 at the age of 51 from the effects of a recurrent osteosarcoma. He left behind a wonderful family: Leslie Brown Aldrich, MD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Michigan and a gastroenterologist; three children, Brian, Matthew, and Jennifer; a sister, Carol Barkin; two brothers, Bob and Tom; and parents, Knight and Julie.

I first met Mike when he came to Ann Arbor as an applicant to our neurology residency program. He was then a medical student at the University of Virginia School of Medicine in Charlottesville. He made a strong impression upon me. He was clearly a highly intelligent student with many interesting life experiences, but he presented himself in a quiet, humble, and somewhat shy manner. He had a sterling academic record and an intense interest in academic neurology. Later, I was very pleased when he matched to this program, and indeed, he proved to be an exceptionally fine resident. As he progressed here, he developed into an outstanding clinical neurologist—kind and considerate to his patients, and adept in diagnosis, management, and treatment. He was also academically productive, writing a succession of papers on stroke, epilepsy, and cortical blindness from observations he made during his residency. Upon completing his residency, he entered a fellowship in electroencephalography and clinical neurophysiology in this department, but he requested permission to receive special training in clinical sleep disorders at Stanford University Medical School. This was granted, and he spent several months there working with William Dement and Christian Guilleminault, and received additional training with Thomas Roth at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit and Allen Rechtschaffen at the University of Chicago. After this fellowship, he joined the University of Michigan faculty with plans to specialize in sleep disorders and to develop a sleep disorders center (figure 1).

Mike Aldrich first became interested in sleep as a child, and continued this interest through adolescence. He was raised in Chicago, where his father, Dr. Knight Aldrich, was Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Chicago. At the age of 9 years, Mike volunteered to be a research subject in a study conducted by Ed Wollpert on the physiologic correlates of dreaming. He may have been the first child to undergo polysomnography. As a high school student, he worked during summer vacations as a research assistant with Allen Rechtschaffen at the University of Chicago, and con-

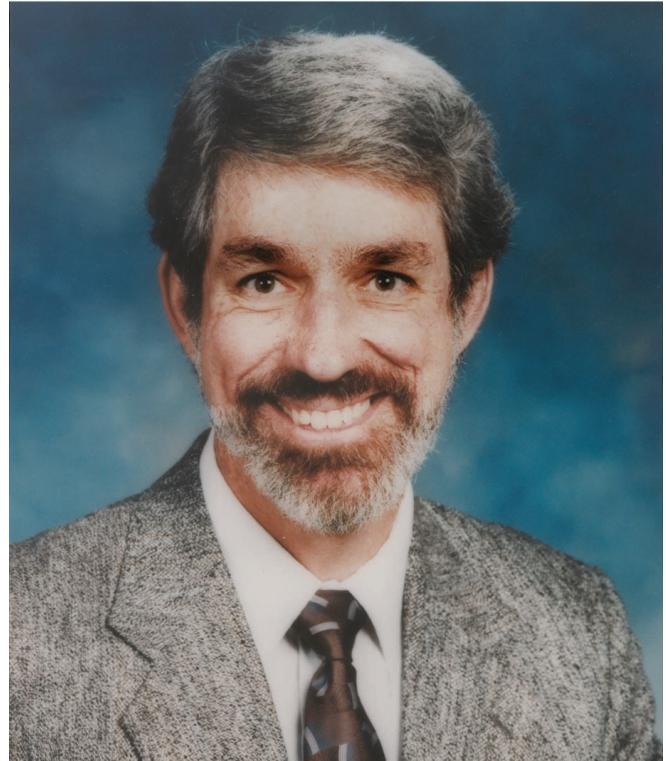


Figure 1. Michael S. Aldrich

tinued this work during his college years at Swarthmore. He pursued this interest as a medical student by taking an elective rotation in the Psychiatric Sleep Disorders Program of Ian Oswald in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Mike began to develop a sleep disorders program in 1985, a time when this field was considered the province of pulmonology and psychiatry, not neurology. Mike's efforts received strong institutional support, and the program began with only two monitored beds in the University of Michigan Hospitals. As the institution was about to open a new hospital and bring down the old hospital, the monitored beds had to be moved three times before the permanent Sleep Disorders Center was established. The Center now consists of a nine-bed, state-of-the-art facility in University of Michigan Hospitals. The laboratory was dedicated as the Michael S. Aldrich Sleep Disorders Center in April of 2000, when Mike was ill. We commissioned Kevin Gordon to paint a portrait of Mike, and the portrait now hangs inside the Michael S. Aldrich Sleep Disorders Center (figure 2).

Mike made multiple seminal contributions to the evaluation, diagnosis, management, and treatment

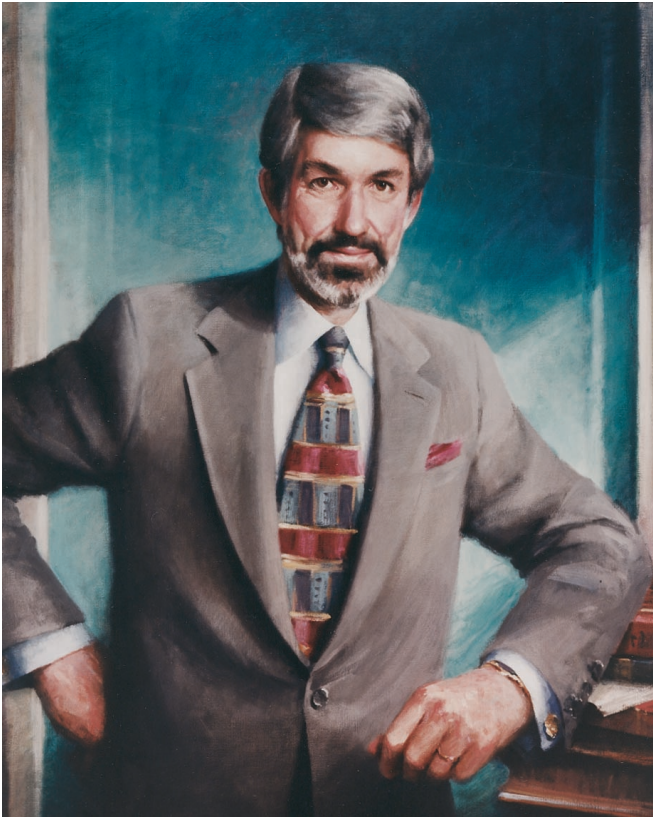


Figure 2. Portrait of Dr. Aldrich in the Michael S. Aldrich Sleep Disorders Center at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

of the common causes of pathologic sleepiness. Narcolepsy was his principal interest, but he was also deeply interested in rapid eye movement sleep behavior disorder (RBD), sleep apnea, and the sleep disorders accompanying neurologic diseases. He produced 64 articles in journals with peer review, four books, and numerous chapters, abstracts, and presentations. He made important contributions to our understanding of the sleep disorders accompanying epilepsy, stroke, and neurodegenerative diseases, and of the interactions of alcohol and sleep. He and I were working on a grant application to study the biochemical basis of RBD in multiple system atrophy and PD at the time that he became ill. He also made substantial contributions to the clinical criteria used for the diagnosis of narcolepsy, and developed a means of differentiating this disorder from other causes of daytime sleepiness. He was Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on research grants from the National Institute of Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse; the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute (NHBLI); and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. He served on several NIH study sections and on six editorial boards for academic publications. He was deeply committed to teaching sleep medicine, and held a Sleep Academic Award from the NHLBI for this purpose.

Mike received admiring recognition from his peers. He was President of the American Board of

Sleep Medicine from 1994 to 1997, and in 1998, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine honored him with its highest form of recognition, the William C. Dement Academic Achievement Award. Just a few weeks before his death, he attended a meeting of the Association of Professional Sleep Societies, and received awards from the American Board of Sleep Medicine, the Sleep Research Society, and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine for his exceptional accomplishments. At a plenary session of the approximately 4,000 sleep clinicians and investigators, Christian Guilleminault paid a special tribute to Mike, noting among his many accomplishments the advances in sleep medicine education that are attributed directly to his efforts. When Mike told me about this event, in his typically humble way, he commented that he did not believe that his contributions were worthy of this level of recognition.

In 1982, Fred Plum invited me to join the Editorial Board of the *Contemporary Neurology Series*, which was then published by F.A. Davis in Philadelphia. Seeking to expand the range of the Series, several years later I asked Mike if he would consider developing a book about sleep disorders. He declined the invitation, stating that he was not sufficiently knowledgeable in the field to do justice to this project. Several years later, having observed Mike's growing stature and impact on the field, I asked him once again whether he would consider writing a book for the Series, which was then published by Oxford University Press. He accepted the assignment, and with astonishing speed, produced a single authored, comprehensive textbook, *Sleep Medicine*, published in 1999. I expect this book will be a classic. It is beautifully written, clear, informative, thoroughly researched, and contains not only an excellent review of the literature, but also Mike's personal observations and experience in the field.

Mike possessed the finest qualities of an academic physician. He had a penetrating intelligence, highly efficient work habits, excellent organizational skills, and absolute integrity. He was a pioneer in his field, and had the vision to explore the areas of greatest impact in the field. He also had extraordinary personal qualities. He was soft-spoken and very modest, but had a wonderful sense of humor; he loved jokes. He was an excellent clinician who related well to his patients, and over the years in this institution, he accumulated a cadre of people whom he had treated and who had improved. Despite the many demands on his time, he had an open-door policy for his associates and trainees. He was constantly available to them and to his patients, sharing generously both his experience and his wisdom. He was also a well-balanced person who greatly valued the time that he spent with his wife, Leslie, and his children. He was as remarkable a husband and father as he was an academic physician. We all miss him enormously.

Sid Gilman, MD

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Neurology 2001;56;6-7

DOI 10.1212/WNL.56.1.6

This information is current as of January 9, 2001

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