Merle A. Sande: 1939–2007

W. Michael Scheld1 and Henry F. Chambers2

1Division of Infectious Diseases and International Health, University of Virginia Health System, Charlottesville; and 2San Francisco General Hospital, San Francisco, California

One of the leading figures in our field—and a former president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA)—Merle A. Sande, passed away peacefully at his home in Seattle on 14 November 2007 surrounded by loved ones. He was 68.

Merle was born and raised in Mt. Vernon, Washington. He earned his BS and MD degrees from Washington State University and the University of Washington, respectively. After residency in internal medicine, a fellowship in infectious diseases at New York Hospital–Cornell, and 2 years of service in the Air Force, Merle accepted his first faculty position at the University of Virginia, where he rapidly rose to the rank of professor of medicine and served as vice chair and acting chair of the Department of Medicine. Merle moved to San Francisco in the fall of 1980 to become chief of medical services at San Francisco General Hospital and vice chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of California–San Francisco. In 1996, he assumed the position of chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of Utah; in 2005, he returned to the University of Washington as professor of medicine, his final academic position.

Merle’s contributions to the field of infectious diseases were enormous. He published >300 original peer-reviewed articles, review articles, and chapters on a wide range of subjects, including but not limited to the following: antimicrobial chemotherapy, pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, misuse, and resistance; antiretroviral therapy; bacterial infections, including endocarditis, meningitis, blood-borne pathogens, gram-negative infections, osteomyelitis, sepsis, sexually transmitted diseases, pneumococcal infection, and staphylococcal disease; infection control; host defense mechanisms; HIV/AIDS; influenza and other viral infections; medical education; nosocomial infections; opportunistic infections; respiratory tract infection; and the pathogenesis of multiple bacterial infections. This body of work, awesome in breadth, has influenced every aspect of infectious diseases.

Shortly after moving to San Francisco in 1981, Merle recognized that a large number of young, otherwise healthy, gay men were presenting with unusual opportunistic infections and cancers. Merle’s early recognition of AIDS led to his prodigious efforts in the early clinical care of patients with AIDS. He established the world’s first inpatient unit dedicated to the care of patients with AIDS. He and his colleagues were also responsible for establishing and articulating the principles of infection control during the early AIDS epidemic that are now called “universal precautions” [1], a major achievement during an era when fear and paranoia surrounded AIDS. Merle lobbied heavily at the local, state, national, and international levels for increased funding for care, prevention, and research on AIDS. He established the Gladstone Institute for Virology and Immunology at San Francisco General Hospital in the early 1990s and was instrumental in conducting some of the earliest trials to study opportunistic infections in AIDS-affected patients in Africa. In 2001, Merle returned to Uganda and cofounded and codirected the Academic Alliance for AIDS Care and Prevention.
in Africa. This unique private-public partnership comprises faculty from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, and faculty from several medical institutions in North America. Collectively, they designed and were responsible for construction of the Infectious Diseases Institute, with funding from Pfizer. This state-of-the-art center for HIV care, prevention, research, and training has become a regional center of excellence in East Africa. The Academic Alliance partnered with the IDSA to form the AIDS training program, to provide an opportunity for IDSA members to train African health care workers in HIV/AIDS care in Kampala. To date, 2000 health care providers from 26 sub-Saharan African countries have been trained in state-of-the-art HIV/AIDS care, as well as the care of other infectious diseases (e.g., tuberculosis and malaria). Although hundreds of people have worked on the Academic Alliance programs, Merle’s legacy is much deeper. Literally tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of patients across sub-Saharan Africa have benefited from Merle’s vision, vigor, and courage. Merle’s leadership style and enthusiasm for infectious diseases influenced many thought leaders in our field. He was the consummate clinician and educator, with a legacy of training and mentoring of literally hundreds of physicians who have assumed leadership positions in industry, academia, public health, and basic and clinical research. The morning reports that he led in Charlottesville, San Francisco, and Salt Lake City are legendary. He edited >20 books and was responsible for the dissemination of new knowledge throughout our field. For many years, he contributed to the “Sanford Guide.”

Merle served on numerous national and international committees and editorial boards of prestigious journals in our field. He was also the recipient of multiple awards, including the following: the Distinguished Alumnus Award from both Washington State University and the University of Washington, the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for Contributions to Health Care in Uganda, and the Alexander Fleming Award for lifetime achievement, the highest honor bestowed by the IDSA.

Merle will always be remembered as an outstanding, innovative, and visionary investigator, educator, clinician, mentor, role model, and leader in our field, with a remarkable career that spanned nearly 4 decades. Merle’s professional accomplishments cannot be appreciated apart from the personal qualities that allowed him to have such a huge impact on people and institutions. Merle was charismatic, gregarious, energetic, and determined and had trouble taking “no” for an answer, all of which made him a naturally effective leader. His warmth and generosity attracted friends, whom he came to regard more as family. We are thankful that Merle was not perfect; otherwise, he would have been insufferable. His fun-loving nature and fondness for high jinks could sometimes lead to trouble, but never for very long—even this propensity was one of his more endearing qualities.

Merle is survived by his wife, Jenny; a sister; 4 children; and 8 grandchildren. The family has requested that all donations be made to the Merle A. Sande Memorial Fund at the Academic Alliance Foundation, 1611 N. Kent St., Ste. 202, Arlington, VA 22209. Please visit the Academic Alliance Foundation Web site [2] for more information.

Acknowledgments


Reference