April 25, 1893-October 11, 1957* It is with the deepest regret that the Board of Editors of International Archives of Allergy and Applied Immunology announce the untimely death of Dr. Bret Ratner, Contributing Editor of the International Archives of Allergy and Applied Immunology, Founder Member of the Collegium Internationale Allergologicum, of a coronary occlusion. All who are interested in the field of immunology and allergy as well as those who knew him personally will realize the great loss suffered by his passing. His career was notable both in its remarkable productivity and in his many diverse interests.

After receiving his degree of Doctor of Medicine from New York University Medical College in 1918, Dr. Ratner spent two years as an Intern in Pathology and Assistant Pathologist at City Hospital in New York City. This was followed by an appointment as Intern and later Resident in Pediatrics at The New York Nursery under the late Oscar M. Schloss, Director of the Pediatric Department and a pioneer in the field of Allergy, under whose influence Dr. Ratner developed an interest in this field which was maintained for the rest of his life. In 1921 he entered into private practice, specializing in Pediatrics and Pediatric Allergy, and began to carry on research in these fields, both clinical and in the laboratories of the late Professor Hans Zinsser, at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons.

* Written for the International Archives of Allergy at the request of the editors-in-chief, by Dr. Murray Dworetzky, 50 East 78th Street, New York City, N. Y.
In 1922 he reported the first cases of rabbit hair asthma in children, whereas prior to this time the only recognized allergy to rabbit hair was in laboratory workers who were in contact with excessive doses of the allergen. In 1923 he published a classic study in which he demonstrated for the first time that colostrum, while important in transmitting antibodies in cattle, had no such importance in the human, and that the human and guinea-pig placentae, in contrast to bovine placentae, allow passage of antibody in the third trimester of pregnancy, thereby making antibody in colostrum unimportant in human and guinea-pig species.

In 1925 Dr. Ratner transferred his research activities to the laboratories of Dr. Holmes C. Jackson, Professor of Physiology at New York University Medical College and after Dr. Jackson’s death, to those of Dr. William H. Park, Professor of Public Health at the same institute, and published an important paper demonstrating the immunological relationship between horse serum and horse dander. Dr. Samuel A. Brown, Dean of the New York University Medical College, recognizing the quality of Dr. Ratner’s work, persuaded the family of Richard T. Crane, Jr., to set up a ten year grant for more extensive studies on experimental asthma, intestinal and placental permeability to proteins and congenital allergy.

In 1925, in a study with Holmes C. Jackson and Helen Lee Gruehl, he reported the successful sensitization and anaphylactic shock of guinea-pigs by the nasal route. This was an important piece of evidence against the so-called Dualistic School, which held that anaphylaxis in lower animals was separate and distinct from allergy in humans, being produced only when routes other than the natural routes were employed. He later added to this evidence when he demonstrated the production of sensitization and asthma in the guinea-pig with dry antigenic powders, in a chamber, simulating sensitization as it occurs in humans through natural means.

In 1926 and 1927 followed a classic series of studies with the same co-authors, which culminated in the publication of five articles making up the entire issue (November 1927) of The Journal of Immunology, in which were reported successful active and passive sensitization of the guinea-pig fetus in utero, and further studies on the role of colostrum and milk in sensitization during the newborn period. Numerous related studies followed in the next several years, all of which crystallized the unitarian concept of allergy, demonstrating that the allergic mechanism is basically the same in the guinea-pig and the human.

In 1932, he reported a clinical study which, together with his earlier studies on placental transmission of antigens and antibodies, led him to believe that infants could be actively sensitized in utero to various foods eaten excessively by the mothers during the last trimester of pregnancy, a concept which he advanced in 1933, when he was invited to open the discussion of Allergy at the Third International Congress of Pediatrics in London. This was followed by a series of studies on the anaphylactogenic properties of raw and modified foodstuffs which were continued until his death. Several studies, which he set up in advance, are being completed posthumously by his co-workers. On the basis of these studies, he concluded that most food proteins were denatured by moist heat to an extent which rendered them non-allergenic or very low in aller-genicity and advocated that a heat denatured diet could usually be used in patients allergic to foods, with the advantage of being superior nutritionally to elimination diets.

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In 1943 he was appointed Director of Pediatrics at the Sea View Hospital for Tuberculosis, Staten Island, N. Y., which post he held until his death. In 1951 he reported studies carried out at this hospital on the care and fate of infants born of tuberculous mothers. In 1951 he initiated
studies on the use of isoniazid therapy in childhood tuberculous meningitis. Six years later he reported on the results of a five year follow-up of these patients. In 1949, he left the New York University Medical College after a happy and fruitful period of twenty-four years, twenty-two of which he served as Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, to accept an appointment as Professor of Clinical Pediatrics and Associate Professor of Immunology at the New York Medical College, New York, N. Y., and Attending Pediatrician and Director of Pediatric Allergy at the Flower and Fifth Avenue Hospitals, which posts he held until his death. He conducted studies on Allergy to Viral and Rickettsial Vaccines, demonstrating that these vaccines could be given with safety, except in children who showed a high degree of sensitivity to egg protein, and that there was no evidence of sensitization to egg in children by repeated injections of these vaccines. During the same period he advanced the concept of the “allergic dermal-respiratory syndrome” in children in a study with Cecil Collins-Williams and Samuel Untracht, in which he demonstrated that about 50 percent of children with eczema eventually develop asthma, concluding that for this reason, more than any other, childhood eczema should be approached as a potentially systemic allergic disease. In addition to this formidable series of achievements, Dr. Ratner published many other papers on clinical and laboratory investigations in the fields of pediatrics and pediatric allergy. He was a great dissenter and had the courage to voice his convictions, even when they opposed popular opinion, but he was as critical of his own work as that of others. In a series of papers and addresses he took exception to the prevailing easy acceptance of the role of heredity in allergic diseases. On the basis of his earlier demonstration of active and passive sensitization of the guinea-pig fetus in utero, as well as evaluation of his own clinical data and re-evaluation of previously reported data by statistical analysis, it was his feeling that heredity may play a role in the predisposition to allergic diseases, but that this was yet to be proved. He was sceptical about many new medications put forth as wonder drugs in the management of allergic diseases, and lived to see them proved worthless or, at best, merely adjuvants that failed to live up to the claims of early enthusiasts. One of his favorite lines was “be not the first to try the new, nor yet the last to cast the old aside”. It was appropriate that only a few days before his death he addressed the American Academy of Pediatrics at its annual meeting in Chicago, one of his papers being “The Use and Abuse of Drugs in the Management of Asthma”. Dr. Ratner was a self-admitted purist in his approach to the subject of allergy and immunology. He continually stressed the antigen-antibody reaction as the basis of the mechanism of all the important phases of allergic diseases in humans and of allergic reactions in animals. He felt deeply that histamine, acetylcholine, or other circulating substances played at best a secondary role and were based, in fact, on the old humoral concepts of allergy, which had been discarded in his youth in favor of the cellular concept. He was an active participant at meetings, and his discussions never failed to stimulate and to crystallize the essence of the subject at hand. In addition to his book “Allergy, Anaphylaxis and Immunotherapy”, Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, 1943, Dr. Ratner had published 134 papers, had contributed chapters to many books and, further, had edited and contributed to the book “Allergy in Relation to Pediatrics”. Though “Allergy, Anaphylaxis and Immunotherapy” has been out of print for many years, it is still considered the most authoritative on the
subject. Its great value lies in the fact that he injected his own concepts, based upon his lifetime of clinical and laboratory research, into the text, as well as in its bibliographic content. It is worthy of note that this book is invariably one of the favorites of laboratory workers in the field throughout the world.

Despite his monumental contributions in the clinic and laboratory, Dr. Ratner was a practising physician in the finest tradition of the profession. He considered himself primarily a pediatrician, and his approach to his young patients was a meticulously comprehensive one long before it became popular to stress the management of the “whole patient”. Though he often decried the overemphasis of psychogenic factors in allergic disease, he was friend and adviser, as well as physician, to his children and their parents and, as such, a psychotherapist of the first rank.

Dr. Ratner was a member of the American Association of Immunologists, the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, and the American Society of Experimental Pathology. He was a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Allergy, the American College of Allergists, and the American College of Chest Physicians. He was also active in a number of local and honorary societies. These include Alpha Omega Alpha, and Sigma Xi. He was a Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences. He was a founder and first Chairman of the Allergy Section of the American Academy of Pediatrics. He was a member of the Board of Regents of the American College of Allergists. He was Vice-Chairman of the Sub-Board of Pediatric Allergy of the American Board of Pediatrics.

He was affiliated with the editorial staff of a number of scientific publications. In addition to being a Contributing Editor to the International Archives of Allergy and Applied Immunology, he was on the Editorial Boards, in various capacities, of the Annals of Allergy, the Quarterly Review of Allergy and Applied Immunology, Folia Clinica Internacional, and the Sea View Hospital Bulletin.

Dr. Ratner was respected and loved by his students, first by the undergraduates who learned from him in the lecture room and at the clinic at New York University Medical College and at New York Medical College and Flower and Fifth Avenue Hospitals and, in the last several years, by the members of his post-graduate courses which were conducted at the latter institution. A measure of the affection of his postgraduate students was seen at the annual dinners which were held in his honor at the conclusion of each year’s course and by the establishment of a Bret Ratner Club. For many years he had a Fellow working under him for a year or more at a time, and these men are now becoming leaders in the field of pediatric allergy in the United States and throughout the world. The doors of his office, his laboratory, and his home were always open to colleagues and, more important, younger men seeking advice or guidance. He gave unhesitatingly and unstintingly of his time and effort in their behalf, and his warm hospitality, with the help of his devoted wife, was legendary among his colleagues.

His interests were limitless. Among other things he was a fine amateur cellist, and numbered a wide circle of outstanding professional musicians among his friends. He was also an enthusiastic chess player.

Dr. Ratner is survived by his wife, Jeanne, three brothers, George and Victor, of New York City, and Dr. Herbert Ratner of Oak Park, Illinois, a daughter, Mrs. Barbara Dworetzky of New York City and two grand-children, Thomas and Joan.

He will be missed, but never forgotten, by all in the fields of pediatrics, pediatric allergy and immunology, by his devoted family, by his wide circle of personal friends, and by the two generations of children and their parents for whom he devoted a life time of dedicated service. Murray Dworetzky