

## TRIBUTE

# Jacob (Jack) Canick (28 November 1944–19 May 2013)

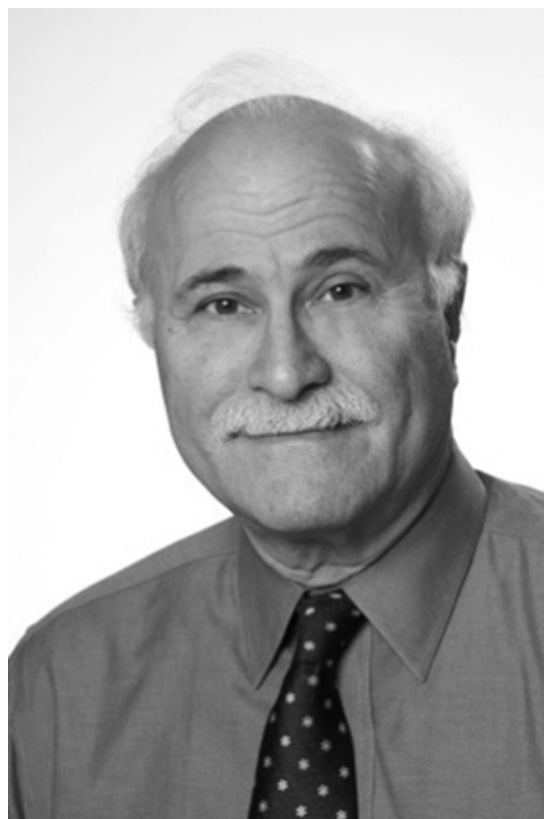
*J Med Screen* 2013;**20**:106–107  
DOI: 10.1177/0969141313497356

Professor Jack Canick was the co-Director of the Division of Medical Screening and Special Testing at the Women and Infants Hospital in Rhode Island and Professor in the Warren Alpert Medical School Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

Jack was a reproductive biologist who played a central role in developing antenatal screening as we know it today. He ran a screening laboratory, engaged in research that had a significant impact in the development of the field and was an outstanding teacher of his subject. Jack entered the field of antenatal screening in 1982, when he moved to Women and Infants Hospital in Providence to establish a screening service for neural tube defects and become the laboratory's founding director. In 1987–88, he correctly predicted that maternal serum unconjugated oestriol might be low in Down's syndrome pregnancies because of fetal immaturity. Oestriol is a metabolite from 16-alpha-hydroxy-DHEAS in the fetus that is converted into oestriol in the placenta and then enters the maternal circulation. This idea led to collaboration between Brown University, the Foundation for Blood Research, and the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine. Having identified low levels of oestriol as a screening marker for Down's syndrome, Jack then contributed to incorporating it into the Triple test, which, for a decade or so, became the main screening test for Down's syndrome in antenatal care throughout the world. In this way Jack built on the initial finding that maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein levels were low in pregnancies with Down's syndrome and that hCG levels were high.

Jack had a delightful ability to work with friends and colleagues, advancing knowledge in his subject. He was a willing team player, sometimes leading the research and sometimes supporting others. His opinion could be relied on. He interpreted evidence objectively, neither dismissing the potential value of a new observation nor exaggerating its importance. This balance and objectivity was fundamental to his excellence as a scientist and a teacher. Jack readily engaged with others. He listened to their views and observations and then discussed them in a friendly and constructive way. If he disagreed it was often most apparent from his facial expression; research meetings with Jack were therefore best carried out face to face, but this was not the only reason for such direct meetings. They were also a pleasure, an educational opportunity, and sometimes opened a new perspective on a current problem that led to its solution.

While not a confrontational person, Jack held to his views when he thought they were right. He incorporated the best in screening practice into the service provided from the laboratory that he ran with Geryl Messerlian. The service is



one of the best of its kind available anywhere. Jack regularly taught at various institutions, including Sarah Lawrence in New York, Brown Medical School, the Foundation for Blood Research and the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine in London. His unexpected and untimely death from a cardiac arrest at Heathrow occurred while travelling from Boston to London to teach on the 2013 antenatal screening course at the Wolfson Institute.

Jack was born in New York City in 1944. He attended Brandeis University where he majored in biology, was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard Medical School, and obtained a PhD from the University of Rhode Island on the trophic effects of ACTH. He held academic appointments at Harvard Medical School, Boston University, and from 1982 at Brown University where he established international stature in research in antenatal screening. Jack became a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal in 2001, and was a founding member of the Medical Screening Society. Having recognized at an early stage that performance

characteristics of most screening and diagnostic tests were poorly defined, Jack's ambition, still not realized in his lifetime, was to establish medical screening as a sub-discipline within medicine. His teaching on the principles of screening was excellent.

Jack will be greatly missed by his friends and colleagues throughout the world. He was a man who showed great loyalty, charm, and respect for those who used evidence objectively in formulating their judgments. Jack enjoyed life outside work. Come 4 or 5pm, Jack's thoughts moved to dining at a favoured place, perhaps preceded by a drink of one of his favourite single malt whiskies. When in

London he rarely missed an opportunity to listen to chamber music at the Wigmore Hall. He was a loving family man. He is greatly missed by his wife Marsha, his sons Simon and Alex, his four grandchildren, his sister Pearl, and his many friends and colleagues throughout the world.

**Nicholas J Wald** Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6BQ, UK

**James Haddow** Institute for Preventive Medicine and Medical Screening, Savjani Institute for Health Research, 35 Main Street, Windham, Maine 04062, USA