

In Memory of John Hansen **1943-2019**

John A. Hansen, MD, a pioneer in transplant immunology, died peacefully at home on July 31, 2019. He was 76 years old.

Hansen served as Medical Director of the Clinical Immunogenetics Laboratory at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance for more than 40 years. After attending Stanford University School of Medicine, Hansen originally planned to pursue cardiac surgery, but the possibilities of immunology drew him in. In 1969, his lab made possible one of the first-known transplants for acute leukemia using an unrelated donor. This success was then instrumental in forming the National Marrow Donor Program, now known as Be The Match.



Hansen made fundamental contributions to the field's understanding of how genetic variation in the immune system contributes to transplant success or failure. He helped define the rules for finding suitable donors for each transplant patient, and he played a key part in the establishment of registries of potential bone marrow donors, who now number in the tens of millions worldwide. He started collections of biological samples and data that have become crucial resources for countless researchers worldwide.

Hansen will be remembered for his incredible creativity and kindness. He was a quiet man who listened more than he talked. Even his most critical scientific reviews left the recipient with a positive feeling. At the same time, he asked – and often answered – revolutionary questions in the field of immunology. Instead of a heart or kidney, can we transplant an immune system? Instead of a sibling, can we successfully perform a transplant from an unrelated donor? And, most recently, can we prevent graft-versus-host disease?

In a 2018 interview, Hansen stated, “Every patient that I’ve known, every patient I’ve helped... every one of them is a precious experience.” Knowing Hansen was a precious experience. He touched the lives of so many people – from patients and family members to trainees and colleagues. We will miss him dearly.