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Leaving a legacy

Jay Lakhani

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Earlier this year, our medical community lost a man whose life impacted many others, a man who truly left a legacy.

Paul Durst grew up in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, and even from grade school, his passion was to become a doctor. He enrolled in the class of 1984, the 4th graduating class in the history of our medical school. After completing his medical education, he was accepted to a family medicine program in Akron, Ohio. While doing his pre-employment testing in Akron, Paul was found to have some abnormal blood tests and was subsequently diagnosed with Hepatitis B, which had resulted from a needle stick injury he sustained earlier that year.

He worked for 10 months and then decided to take a month off to rest and gain energy. Unfortunately, he was not able to go back to work and complete his residency. The following years were very difficult, but in the early 90s, Paul began feeling better again. He spoke with the dean of the medical school, Dr. Charles McKown, and Paul enrolled in the pathology residency program in the mid 90s.

He struggled at first. He had not planned on being a pathologist, and he missed patient care, but Paul eventually realized that while this was not his plan, God was directing him on a different path.

He completed his residency in 2001, 17 years after finishing medical school, and he loved his job. He loved diagnosing biopsies and solving puzzles. But just as much, he loved teaching and mentoring medical students, of whom I was one. He was one of my pathology professors during the 2nd year of medical school, and his lectures were engaging. I personally became acquainted with the Durst family when Paul was the faculty sponsor for the Christian medical association. The Durst family would host events at their home, and he was always so welcoming and encouraging. I never realized how much they were going through. None of us did, because he didn't tell us. He never complained to me about his life. He always had that welcoming smile and a warm enthusiasm that made a person feel like they really mattered. He exemplified perseverance and humility

Paul faced setbacks, unexpected challenges, disappointments, and frustrations, but amidst all these, he never quit. He kept moving forward. Later in his career, he would continue to work for eight years while doing dialysis at home. He would teach pathology lectures in a wheelchair and with his oxygen tank.

Paul was also a man of humility. He treated everyone equally. He spoke to everyone whether he knew them or not. He regarded the janitor in the hospital to be as important as the physician.

Paul Durst left a legacy. He demonstrated perseverance despite enormous setbacks. He chose humility over hierarchy.

Occasionally in life we are given the opportunity to encounter men and women of such caliber. I am thankful that I knew Dr. Paul Durst.