

Donald B. Hunninghake, MD (1934–2012)

Donald B. Hunninghake, MD, died Feb. 2, 2013, at the age of 78 . His life and intellect touched many in the lipidology and cardiology community throughout the world, but his lasting legacy is undoubtedly his advocacy for the wise use of drug therapies to manage dyslipidemias as a means of reducing the burden of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Hunninghake earned his medical degree in 1967 from the University of Kansas where he also completed postgraduate training in internal medicine, cardiology, and clinical pharmacology. He moved to the University of Minnesota where he helped found and direct the Lipid Research Clinic. This clinic joined with similar clinics across the country to conduct the now infamous Coronary Primary Prevention Trial published in 1984 — the first randomized controlled trial to demonstrate that lowering blood cholesterol levels in primary prevention adults significantly reduced coronary artery disease events. A year later, because of this seminal work, the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) was formed. In 1988, Dr. Hunninghake served on the first NCEP Adult Treatment Expert Panel as chairman of its Drug Treatment Section, which issued guidelines for the detection, evaluation, and treatment of high blood cholesterol. He also helped produce two subsequent NCEP Adult Treatment Panel cholesterol treatment guidelines in 1992 and 2001 and an update in 2004.

At the University of Minnesota, Dr. Hunninghake organized and oversaw the Heart Disease Prevention Clinic through which he expressed his interest in the prevention of coronary heart disease via lipid management. This clinic became one of the nation's leading centers in conducting clinical trials of new drugs for the control of elevated cholesterol levels. He became a consultant to his university colleagues for the management of dyslipidemic patients and is fondly remembered by them and his patients for his care and thoughtfulness in their management. It was in this clinic that his insights into the management of dyslipidemia were formed, enabling him to play such a pivotal role on a national stage.

However, Dr. Hunninghake's considerable expertise and skill were camouflaged by his self-effacing and considerate demeanor. Only those who had an opportunity to work closely with him fully appreciated the depth of his knowledge and insights. His influence on the field of lipidology continues to be expressed today through those junior colleagues he trained at the university, those lipidologists who had an opportunity to work with him, those clinicians he taught through his lectures and writings, and those patients throughout the world who lived a better life because of his contributions to cholesterol treatment guidelines.