

Boston remembers Jewish father of chemotherapy

By Sara Brown
Advocate staff

BOSTON – It has been 75 years since Dr. Saul Hertz's discovery of the medical uses of radioiodine.

It is a discovery that is still praised by many in the medical world. On Oct. 20, the Countway Library of Medicine is honoring Hertz and his legacy. Dr. Lewis Braverman (professor of Boston Medical Center), Dr. Frederic Fahey and Dr. M. Sara Rosenthal (professor of Bioethics, U of Ky) will discuss the history of Hertz's discovery of the medical uses of radioiodine. Radioiodine is the first and gold standard of targeted cancer therapies.

"I appreciate that they are honoring him," Barbara Hertz, Dr. Hertz's daughter, said. "It's an important story to tell."

On Nov. 12, 1936, Dr. Karl Compton, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology,

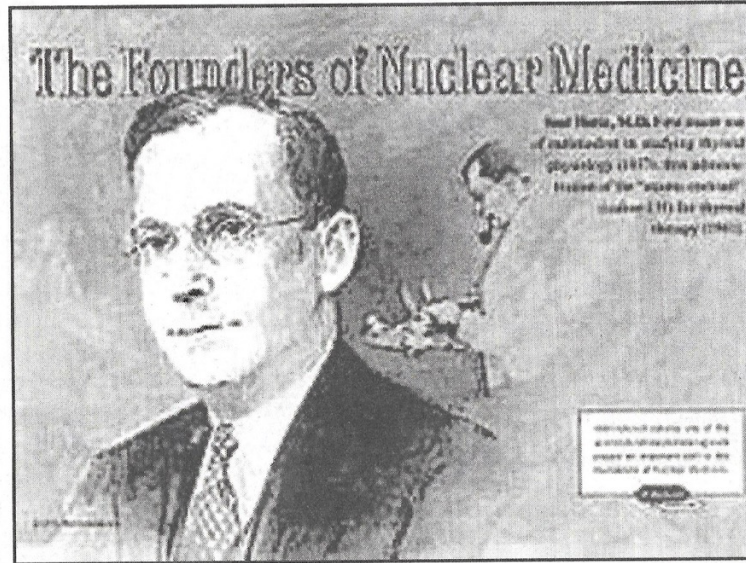
spoke at a luncheon lecture. Compton was speaking about what physics can do for biology and medicine. After the presentation, Dr. Hertz asked Compton if iodine could be made radioactive artificially.

Compton eventually wrote to Dr. Hertz a month later explaining that iodine could be made radioactive artificially. Soon, Dr. Hertz partnered with MIT physicist Dr. Arthur Roberts. Their early experiments in 1937 involving 48 rabbits demonstrated that the normal thyroid gland concentrated Iodine 128, and the hyperplastic thyroid gland took up even more iodine.

In 1941, Dr. Hertz became the first to administer cyclotron produce, radioactive iodine at the Massachusetts General Hospital that led to a series of 29 patients with hyperthyroidism. It proved to be a success treatment of hyperthyroidism.

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Mallinckrodt, a \$2.1 billion global pharmaceutical company, honors Dr. Saul Hertz's discovery of the medical uses of radioiodine

perthyroidism.

Despite his incredible mind, Dr. Hertz faced discrimination for being Jewish. Dr. Hertz served in the Navy during World War II. Dr. Hertz's military leave of absence with the provision to return to his position at MGH was not honored. It was a time where hospitals had a quota system in place for hiring Jews. Also, Dr. Earl Chapman and MIT's Robley Evans who had taken over Dr. Hertz's established cases,

while Hertz was serving his country in the war, went to publish an article in The Journal of The American Medical Association without Dr. Hertz's name.

In 1946, Hertz then joined the staff of Boston's newly expanded Beth Israel Hospital where Jews were welcomed. He went on to develop radioiodine as the first targeted cancer therapy as well as exploring the influence of hormones on cancer.

When his daughter thinks of the struggles her father went through she is astounded.

"I grew up in Brookline. Everyone was either Irish or Jewish. I never felt that there were any limitations placed on us because we were Jewish," she said.

Dr. Hertz's legacy still touches people to this day. A former patient recently reached out to Hertz to let her know what her father meant to her.

"Treatment with radioactive iodine knocked the thyroid cancer (metastatic to a little bit of bone and lung) right out of me, exceeding my doctor's expectations... I am now 81. We have a large family. Many were praying for me. The cure delivered on the wings of prayer was, the miracle of radioactive iodine. Few can equal such a powerful and precious gift," the email read.

Hertz said she hopes to her father's story continues to inspire other researchers.

"It demonstrates his vision, his tenacity and his strength of moral character," she said. "When other researchers face hurdles, hopefully my father's story will help them to continue to do the right thing."