

## Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D Obituary

written by Alex Cohen

Dr. Gene D. Cohen, 65, geriatric psychiatrist and health care pioneer, died peacefully at his Kensington, MD home surrounded by his loving family and friends after a brave, 14 year fight against prostate cancer.



**image by Joshua Soros -- please cite**

Dr. Cohen's professional career was dedicated to the field of aging and geriatrics long before the field even existed. After graduating from Harvard College and Georgetown University School of Medicine, Dr. Cohen began shaping the field of geriatrics through his work at the National Institute of Mental Health in the early 1970's. Here he was the first chief of the Center on Aging and Director of the Program on Aging. At that time, this was the first federally supported national center on mental health and aging established internationally. When Dr. Cohen arrived only one specialty program in geriatric psychiatry existed and when he left there were dozens. Also during these early years at NIMH, Dr. Cohen took interest in minorities—encouraging and supporting research on the mental health of the impoverished and homeless and led the charge to change Medicare to allow for reimbursement of mental health services (beyond the original annual \$250 limit). Dr. Cohen continued his commitment to biological, psychological and social issues in geriatric medicine at the National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health where he

served as Acting Director and helped grow the institute budget into the \$100's of millions and catapult the field of aging into the global spotlight. During Dr. Cohen's tenure, NIA grew at the greatest rate of all the Institutes at NIH.

Dr. Cohen's contributions to geriatric medicine are limitless. He authored over 150 publications in the field of aging including several edited text books and individually authored books including, *The Creative Age: Awakening the Human Potential in the Second Half of Life* published in 2000 and most recently, *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*. The former is widely considered the groundbreaking book on creativity and aging—effectively launching this new field

within geriatrics. Additionally, Dr. Cohen was a founding member of both the American Psychiatric Association Council on Aging as well as its Chair and the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry in addition to being the founding editor for both of the leading Journals in geriatric psychiatry—International Psychogeriatrics and the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry. Dr. Cohen's research and work contributed significantly to the AARP's growing focus on mental health and aging and their evolving policy direction in this regard.

Since 1994, Dr. Cohen has acted as the first director of the Center on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University where he held the positions of Professor of Health Care Sciences and Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. His recent work and research focused primarily on creativity and the potential of older adults including a landmark longitudinal study (principally funded by the National Endowment for the Arts) proving that engagement in professionally conducted arts programs by older adults led to significant health benefits. As he did in the 1970's, Dr. Cohen led this growing field and now, through a close partnership with The National Center for Creative Aging which has newly affiliated with the Center he founded at George Washington University, his work will continue to flourish and evolve in this dynamic field of geriatrics--creativity and aging.

Dr. Cohen's professional interests were also reflected in his personal life and hobbies. As a blossoming game inventor after age 50 and continuing through to the end of his life, Dr. Cohen showed first hand that creativity and untapped potential are possible for older adults. His most recent game, *Making Memories Together*, is one that assists families and caregivers of Alzheimer's disease patients.

Throughout Dr. Cohen's career he was highly respected for his vision, generosity and absolute commitment to the field of aging and improving the health of older persons. Dr. Cohen's contribution as a scholar, physician, educator and pioneer in the field of geriatric medicine will resonate for many generations to come.

Dr. Cohen leaves behind a wife, Wendy Miller, and daughter, Eliana Miller-Cohen, both of Kensington, MD, son, Alex Cohen and daughter-in-law Kate Cohen, both of Lincolnton, ME and four grandchildren, Ruby, Lucy, Ethan, and Bennett Cohen.

A memorial service will be held at 11:00AM, Monday November 9<sup>th</sup> at Temple Emanuel, 10101 Connecticut Avenue, Kensington, MD 20895. 301-942-2000. A private burial service will follow. Shiva will be held at the family home November 9<sup>th</sup> from 8:00PM-9:30PM and November 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> from 6:00PM-8:00PM.

[Memorial donations](http://www.creativeaging.org/donate/) can be made to the Gene D. Cohen M.D., Ph.D Research Award at <http://www.creativeaging.org/donate/>.

Games invented exclusively by Gene's game company, GENCO™ can be purchased at [http://www.genco-games.com/genco\\_order-new.html](http://www.genco-games.com/genco_order-new.html)