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**In Memoriam:
Bekele Afessa, M.D.**

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Dr. Bekele Afessa, Professor of Medicine and prominent clinician, educator, and researcher at the Mayo Clinic, passed away Thursday, January 10, 2013, in Rochester, Minnesota. He was 57.

During more than a three-decade career in pulmonary and critical care medicine, Dr. Afessa has authored close to 150 research publications and book chapters. He made special contributions in the fields of sepsis [1–4], ventilator-associated pneumonia [5–7], ICU complications in recipients of bone marrow transplantation [8–13], and critical care outcomes research [14–24].

However, Dr. Afessa was much more than an amazingly talented physician-scientist. He was an early and unusually focused leader in quality improvement and patient safety in the intensive care unit. His research made major contributions to accomplish the goal of improving critical care delivery at the Mayo Clinic and gained him international respect among the critical care community. Dr. Afessa was the first who challenged the idea that critical care delivery at our institution was “perfect”. He talked about quality and safety before many of us could spell these words. He was known for his unquestioned honesty and determination, and never backed down if the data showed that change was needed. He was way ahead of his time and of course in hindsight was proven correct. Because he was not a politician he rarely received “official” recognition but he contributed more than anyone to the improvements in critical care delivery in our institution and beyond.

More enduring will be his legacy in educating and training the next generation of intensive care physicians. He shared his knowledge freely with peers, residents, students, nurses, pharmacists, and respiratory therapists. He was elected a teacher-of-the-year every single year since coming to the Mayo Clinic. He was always very kind to his students and juniors, and tough on the bosses. A passionate advocate for improving critical care education and patient care worldwide, he was a true mentor and role model for many.

Dr. Afessa’s outstanding professional achievements pale in comparison to his attributes as a human being. He combined toughness of mind and discipline with humility and compassion. He was a uniquely gentle soul. Like a shining lantern, he showed the way and brightened the journey of those who traveled with him. His absence will be felt in the

ICU, the squash court, and in our hearts. Colleagues from all over the world will miss him.

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