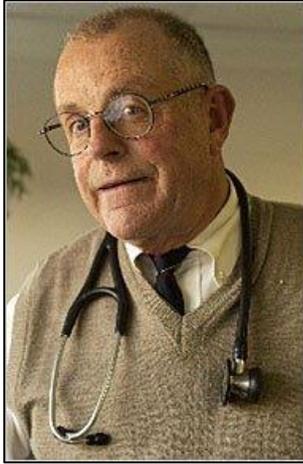


ISHLT Pioneer Award

2008 Recipient – Richard Lower, MD



Richard Lower, MD, is an American pioneer of cardiac surgery, particularly in the field of heart transplantation. As a surgical resident at Stanford University in 1959, Dr. Lower transplanted part of a dog's heart to a second dog, which lived for eight days, shattering a previous survival record of seven hours. He was working with Dr. Norman E. Shumway, who became a towering figure in cardiac surgery and eventually oversaw the transplanting of 800 human hearts.

Dr. Lower declined an opportunity to perform an early heart transplant because of incompatibility of the blood types of the potential donor and recipient. Then, in 1968, he operated on a 54-year-old man, who died a week afterward. In the same year, Dr. Lower operated on a 43-year-old man, and that surgery proved to be highly effective; the patient survived for six and a half years.

Lower and Shumway remained at the forefront of the transplant battle, though Lower was subjected to a million-dollar lawsuit for supposedly causing "the wrongful death" of a brain-dead donor in Virginia in 1968. The donor's family, who could not be found in the 24 hours preceding the transplant, were encouraged to sue him. Lower had to put his work on hold while fighting a courtroom trial - which finally resulted in his vindication in May 1972. His victory changed the course of US medical legislation, so that surgeons could at last take organs from brain-dead patients.

Throughout the 1970s, with cardiac transplantation reeling from organ rejection and negative publicity, only Shumway at Stanford and Lower at Virginia continued their work. Their success in conquering rejection was sealed with the advent of cyclosporine in 1981; and Lower's transplant unit remained a world leader until his retirement eight years later.

Dr. Lower was honored with the 2008 Pioneer Award at the ISHLT 28th Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions in Boston, MA, USA.