

Harold N. Bornstein, Trump's Former Personal Physician, Dies at 73

He attested that Trump would be the 'healthiest president ever,' but was later expelled from the Trump orbit.



By Katharine Q. Seelye

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Dr. Harold N. Bornstein in his office on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in 2016. He inherited Donald Trump as a patient from his father, who whom he shared the practice for many years. Chantal Heijnen

Dr. Harold N. Bornstein, who for a time was President Donald J. Trump's personal physician and who had attested that Mr. Trump would be "the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency," died on Friday. He was 73.

His death was announced on Thursday in a paid notice in The New York Times. It did not give a cause or say where he died.

Loquacious, hirsute and eccentric, Dr. Bornstein, a gastroenterologist, was Mr. Trump's personal physician from 1980 to 2017. He had inherited Mr. Trump as a patient from his father, Dr. Jacob Bornstein, with whom he shared a medical practice on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, at Park Avenue and 78th Street.

When Mr. Trump was elected president in 2016, Dr. Bornstein had hoped to be named White House physician and suggested as much to a longtime Trump assistant. But he was expelled from the Trump orbit after he disclosed to The New York Times that the president was taking medication to make his hair grow.

Dr. Bornstein came to public attention in December 2015, during his famous patient's campaign for president.

Mr. Trump, a Republican, had been insinuating that Hillary Clinton, his likely Democratic opponent, did not have the stamina to serve as president. In response to questions about his own health, he ordered Dr. Bornstein to issue "a full medical report." Mr. Trump predicted that although he would be 70 when he took office, the oldest president ever to be inaugurated for the first time, the report would show that the state of his health was "perfection."

He soon released a four-paragraph letter signed by Dr. Bornstein saying that his blood pressure and unspecified lab test results were "astonishingly excellent," and that his strength and stamina were "extraordinary."

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Using hyperbole more often associated with Mr. Trump than with the medical profession, the letter added: "If elected, Mr. Trump, I can state unequivocally, will be the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency."

The statement, which Dr. Bornstein insisted he had written, brought him a flurry of publicity, but as time went on, the media interviewed him about other topics.

In a series of interviews with The Times in 2017, he said that President Trump was taking a prostate-related drug, Propecia, to promote hair growth — the same drug that Dr. Bornstein himself was taking to maintain his own shoulder-length locks.



Dr. Bornstein on Park Avenue outside his office in 2015. He claimed that representatives of President Trump had raided his office looking for Mr. Trump's medical records. Joe Marino/NY Daily News, via Getty Images

He told The Times that he had had no contact with Mr. Trump since he had become president and that the White House had not asked him to forward Mr. Trump's medical records, as new administrations traditionally do.

He also complained of the poor seats he had been assigned for the president's inauguration.

Dr. Bornstein later told NBC News that two days after The Times article appeared, three representatives of Mr. Trump had "raided" his office and taken all of Mr. Trump's medical records. They also told him to remove a picture he had on the wall of him with Mr. Trump.

"I feel raped," Dr. Bornstein told NBC.

White House officials told NBC that no raid had occurred, that the men had retrieved the president's medical records as "standard operating procedure," and that Dr. Bornstein had been cooperative.

Still, Dr. Bornstein said he felt that he was being punished for talking to The Times. He said that Rhona Graff, Mr. Trump's longtime executive assistant and senior vice president of the Trump Organization, had called him after the article appeared and told him: "So you wanted to be the White House doctor? Forget it, you're out."

It was after this series of events, which took place over a couple of years, that Dr. Bornstein finally said publicly in 2018 what many had suspected all along — that Mr. Trump himself had written the letter saying that he would be the healthiest president ever.

"He dictated that whole letter," he told CNN. "I didn't write that letter."

Harold Nelson Bornstein was born on March 3, 1947, in New York City to Dr. Jacob and Maida (Seltzer) Bornstein. From an early age he wanted to be a doctor, like his father. A photograph in his office showed him as a smiling young boy holding a stethoscope to what appeared to be a teddy bear, according to a 2016 profile of him the medical news website STAT. In high school, he played in a band called Doc Bornstein and the Interns.

Dr. Bornstein went to Tufts, outside Boston, graduating in 1968, and earned his medical degree there in 1975. He had a strong allegiance to the university, which 19 members of his extended family had attended over the years. He cut a flamboyant figure on campus, was a good student, if irreverent, and wrote poetry under the pseudonym Count Harold.

Dr. Bornstein eventually joined his father at his practice in Manhattan and had privileges at Lenox Hill Hospital, also on the Upper East Side. His father at one point had lived in Jamaica, Queens, near Mr. Trump's boyhood home, and a patient of Jacob Bornstein's is believed to have introduced them. The elder Dr. Bornstein died in 2010 at 93.

Dr. Bornstein was proud of the concierge medical practice he ran with his father for more than 50 years. "My greatest successes," he said in a 2017 interview with a Tufts medical school alumni magazine, "have been avoiding managed-care medicine and refusing to have the conservative beard and haircut that my parents thought was necessary for success."

Dr. Bornstein, who lived north of New York City in Scarsdale, N.Y. was married three times, most recently to Melissa Brown, who survives him. He is also survived by a daughter, Alix; two sons who are also medical doctors, Robyn and Joseph; and two other sons, Jereme and Jackson, according to the published death notice.

Dr. Bornstein was initially pleased with the attention he received as Mr. Trump's personal physician, though his notoriety later subjected him and his family to harassment.

The back of his business cards, STAT reported, included his name and below that, written in Italian, the phrase "dottore molto famoso" — "very famous doctor."

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