Chester M. Pierce, M.D. (1927-2016) was an innovative researcher on humans in extreme environments and a lifelong advocate against disparities, stigma, and discrimination, coining the term “microagression” in 1970. He was the Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, Professor Emeritus of Education at Harvard University, and served on the faculty of the Harvard School of Public Health. He was a Senior Psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), where he spent much of his career, and also a psychiatrist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for almost 25 years. His legacy continues through the Chester M. Pierce Research Society for Minority Investigators at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), as well as the Chester M. Pierce Division of Global Psychiatry, which is part of the Department of Psychiatry at MGH and is inspired by the lifework of the founder, Dr. Pierce, and committed to improving mental health training, research, and clinical care in the international community.

Dr. Pierce was the Past President of both the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and the American Orthopsychiatric Association, served on The Carter Center Mental Health Task Force from 2001 to 2004, and was the founding president of the Black Psychiatrists of America Association and the National Chairperson of the Child Development Associate Consortium. Dr. Pierce held the rank of Commander in the US Navy and was the senior consultant to the Surgeon General of the U.S. Air Force, the Children’s Television Network (Sesame Street, Electric Company), the U.S. Arctic Research Commission (naming a peak in Antarctica “Pierce Peak”), and the Peace Corps. His professional service has included chairing committees for the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Research Council, the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the board of the World Association of Social Psychiatry, as well as the boards of local and national voluntary organizations concerned with youth, human rights, and conservation. Dr. Pierce has been invited to lecture on all seven continents and has spoken at more than 100 colleges and universities in the United States. In 2002, Dr. Pierce organized a groundbreaking "African Diaspora" international conference, which recently convened again in 2016 in South Africa, that brought together psychiatrists of African descent from all over the globe to discuss common issues and challenges. He has received numerous honorary degrees, and honorary fellowships in the Royal College of Psychiatry and in the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, and was the recipient of the 2015 American Psychiatric Association Human Rights Award.

Dr. Pierce is revered by his many students of all backgrounds and ethnic groups as a brilliant, scholarly, kind, and humble professor who brought great dignity and honor to his profession. He was a visionary pioneer in the field of global mental health and his wisdom continues to guide us today.