Ronald K. Tompkins, 1934–2021

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Ronald K. Tompkins, M.D., served as Editor of the World Journal of Surgery from 1993–2004 and will be remembered for his compassion, kindness, and expertise. Ron passed away on August 17, 2021, in Santa Monica, CA. He was 86 years of age.

Ron was born in Malta, Ohio, the only child of Mildred and Kenneth Tompkins, and grew up in Ohio graduating from Glouster High School. He received his undergraduate degree with highest honors in chemistry from Ohio University in Athens in 1956 and his medical degree from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1960. Ron served in the United States Air Force from 1959–64, rising to the rank of Captain, serving as Chief of Aerospace Medicine and of the Otolaryngology Service at the Griffiss USAF Hospital in New York, and receiving the Air Force

Longevity Service Award and Flight Surgeon Rating and Wings.

After the military, Ron returned to Ohio for general surgery residency and was trained by the legendary Dr. Robert M. Zollinger at the Ohio State University. During residency, Ron spent two years in the laboratory as a postdoctoral fellow in physiological chemistry, and under Dr. Zollinger's mentorship, he studied endocrine tumors found in patients who presented with Watery Diarrhea, Hypokalemia, and Achlorhydria (WDHA) syndrome. The studies suggested that a hormone was the cause of the symptoms, and confirmation came of this some 49 years later when in 2017 the Ohio State University group conclusively identified secretin as the hormone in one of the original tumors. The discovery of a primary pancreatic secretinoma as a cause of diarrheogenic syndrome, originally proposed in 1968, was confirmed. Ron viewed this as one of his most important scientific contributions [1].

In 1969, Ron moved his family to California and joined the UCLA faculty, becoming full Professor in 1979. He was Chief of the Division of General Surgery from 1982 to 1988 and Chief of the Section of Gastrointestinal Surgery from 1988 to 1997. He also served as Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and Associate Dean for Veterans' Affairs.

Always a dedicated and gifted educator, Ron spent much of his career advancing surgical education at UCLA. He served as Director of the Basic Surgical Training Program from 1970–80, Director of the General Surgery Residency Program from 1982 to 1988, and inaugural Director of Surgical Education from 1999 through 2004. During this later period, he took a one-year sabbatical studying modern educational principles including methods for technical skill training and assessment. For all of his effort and ability, Ron received the Golden Scalpel Award for Teaching Excellence in 1986. He became Professor Emeritus in

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2004, and the Department of Surgery recognized his extraordinary contributions to surgical education with naming of the annual Ronald K. Tompkins Golden Apple Award, honoring a surgical resident selected by medical students for outstanding student teaching.

Ron was an internationally acclaimed hepatobiliary and gastrointestinal surgeon, and much of most cited work was in the field of biliary disease [2, 3]. These qualities and aspects of his large practice are remembered at UCLA down to the present day. Ron kept his own surgical instruments stored in a special case that would be sterilized for each operation. Known for meticulous technique, he used a scalpel blade to dissect the gallbladder from the liver bed. Known for humor, he wore a cloth cap with witty inscriptions until such personal garb was forbidden in favor of disposables. And for nearly four decades, he cared for thousands of patients who were the beneficiaries of his compassionate and disciplined approach to his art and craft.

Ron held membership in 44 prestigious surgical societies and many leadership positions including presidency of the Pacific Coast Surgical Association, International Biliary Association, Los Angeles Surgical Society, Southern California Chapter of the American College of Surgeons, and Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract. He was awarded Honorary Membership in the French Surgical Association and the Japan Surgical Society and was particularly proud of an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Bordeaux bestowed by his friend and colleague, Professor Jacques Perissat. He also served as a Director of the American Board of Surgery. Ron was an NIH-funded investigator, a prolific author, and an

international lecturer with countless visiting professorships to his credit.

Ron is survived by his beloved wife of 65 years, Suzanne Colbert Tompkins; three children, Gregory (Elizabeth), Teresa Read (Stuart) and Geoffrey (Amy); and six grandchildren and one great granddaughter, all of whom adored “Grandpa Ron.”

RKT, as he was fondly known by his trainees and colleagues, was the consummate academic surgeon. Through his role as Editor, his influence on the field was international, and he will be remembered as a superb clinician and an inspired educator, mentor and leader. He taught generations of surgeons, and his commitment to his profession was steadfast and unswerving. We have lost a great surgeon, role model, and friend in Dr. Ronald K. Tompkins.

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