

Jack W. McElwain, M.D.

The specialty of colon and rectal surgery has lost one of its brightest stars with the death of Jack W. McElwain, M.D.

Jack was born on April 17, 1921, to Dr. Clifford and Metta McElwain in Syracuse, New York, a city that was his home from infancy through medical school. There, he demonstrated early his outstanding abilities as a student, athlete, musician, and leader. Following high school, where he starred in lacrosse and golf, Jack attended Syracuse University, Class of 1943, and Syracuse Medical School. After graduating from medical school in 1945, Jack followed in the footsteps of his father, serving in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps. Initially stationed at Treasure Island Naval Hospital on San Francisco Bay, Jack then went onto St. Albans Naval Hospital on Long Island, New York.

Jack began his residency training in surgery at Syracuse University Medical Center. This was followed by a fellowship in surgical pathology at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York. A residency in general surgery at Meadowbrook Hospital, now known as the Nassau County University Medical Center, was followed by a residency with Dr. Harry Bacon at Temple University in Philadelphia, where he earned a Master of Science in Surgery in 1953. This began a long and close relationship with Dr. Bacon.

Jack began practice on Long Island, where he established the Department of Colon and Rectal Surgery at the Nassau County Medical Center and taught a generation of both general and colon and rectal surgeons. Initially this began as a preceptorship program and was later expanded into a formal colon and rectal surgery residency.

Jack was instrumental in the establishment of strong academic links between the medical school of the State University of New York at Stony Brook and the Nassau County Medical Center, serving as President of the Liaison Committee in 1974. As Clinical Professor of Surgery, Jack was always firm, fair, and strong-minded. He was an excellent operating surgeon and contributed to the literature, his main interest being cancer of the rectum, and was an early proponent of the "Bacon Pull-Through Procedure." In



addition, Jack made important contributions to our understanding of anorectal abscess and fistula.

Jack's exceptional organizational ability helped create the Northeastern Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons, which was formed from an amalgam of regional colorectal surgical societies in the Northeastern United States. This society created a forum for scientific and social interaction among its members and their families and fostered long-lasting professional and personal friendships. Jack served this society in many leadership capacities, including the role of President. In 1999, in his honor, the Northeastern Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons established the Jack W. McElwain Award, which is presented annually for the most outstanding presentation by a resident in colon and rectal surgery. Jack also established the Nassau Academy of Medicine and founded the Harry E. Ba-

con Research and Educational Foundation, which in addition to its many contributions, instituted the Bacon Lecture at the annual meeting of The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons.

Jack's leadership extended across many medical organizations. He served as President of both the New York and Pennsylvania Societies of Colon and Rectal Surgeons, the Nassau County Medical Society, and the Nassau Surgical Society. He served as Vice President of the International Society of University Colon and Rectal Surgeons. He was an active member of the American Medical Association and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. As a Fellow of The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons, he was elected Vice President and served on many committees, including Chairman of the Residency Review Committee.

Jack's vision for our specialty was demonstrated in his capacity as a trustee of the Research Foundation of The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons. His philanthropic efforts helped fund research grants and the establishment of endowed professorships in the specialty of colon and rectal surgery.

Jack received many awards for his work as a master surgeon, but one honor of which he was especially proud was his American Film Festival Award in 1966 for his animated film "The Surgical Treatment of High Intermuscular Rectal Abscess," which showcased another of Jack's talents, film animation.

Jack's life centered on his love of his family, his profession, and his friends. He was a man of style and class. He and his wife, Kelly, were gracious hosts and their parties were legendary. Jack enjoyed his friendships and treasured them through his lifetime. Who else would have regular reunions of his kindergarten

class, even after 70 years? He was full of fun and larger than life, with a superb capacity for laughter. Jack enjoyed regaling his friends with his hilarious stories. He had a comic's sense of timing. In addition to his professional abilities and philanthropy, Jack was an outstanding gardener, fisherman, pilot, cook, bridge player, and trombone player. He was an accomplished pianist and songwriter, with an excellent singing voice. A scratch golfer, Dr. Stuart Quan called Jack "a magician on the golf course."

A great supporter of local community causes, Jack was cited for his 40 years of outstanding work for the Nassau County Cerebral Palsy Association. While serving on its Executive Committee, Jack helped raise enormous sums for their programs. His communication skills, affability, enthusiasm, energy, vision, courage, and hard work are widely lauded as being the basis for Jack's success. He had a strong personal impact on people, which rallied them to his causes.

After retiring from active practice, Jack continued to attend surgical meetings and contribute his experience and expertise. His last few years were overshadowed by kidney failure requiring dialysis, but he never complained and remained optimistic. Later, with the onset of cardiac problems, he required cardiac valve replacements. He died January 30, 2002, after an extended postoperative period. He leaves his wife Ruth (Kelly) and his daughters Donna Helder and Valerie Flynn. His spirit and enthusiasm as well as his contributions to the furtherance of our specialty will be missed and long remembered.

James F. Guthrie, M.D.
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