In memoriam: John Joseph Gallagher MD: a founder and pioneer of modern clinical electrophysiology (March 3, 1943, to November 21, 2020)

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Received: 12 December 2020 / Accepted: 23 December 2020 / Published online: 1 February 2021
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John Gallagher was born in Brooklyn, New York, and completed his undergraduate studies at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. He graduated magna cum laude from the Georgetown University Medical School in 1968 and interned at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. In 1970, he was drafted and joined the United States Public Health Service Hospital, Staten Island, New York, where he worked with Anthony Damato and Benjamin Scherlag where he developed his lifelong interest in clinical cardiac

electrophysiology. In 1972, he returned to Duke University and joined the faculty in 1974 to lead the electrophysiology program. His classic investigations in electrophysiologic evaluation of supraventricular tachycardias imparted global stature to his center. These classic studies now form the basis of the modern classification of preexcitation syndromes that is in vogue today. In collaboration with surgeon Will Sealy and others, the Duke team under his leadership pioneered the intraoperative mapping of accessory pathways for surgical ablation. Collaboration with biomedical engineers led to the development of epicardial mapping with a “sock based” epicardial array, employed by many leading centers including ours, for intraoperative mapping for surgical ablation in the eighties and beyond. He was one of the earliest practitioners of alternative energy sources of ablation using cryoablation techniques. An early proponent of atrioventricular junction ablation with a catheter technique using direct current shock therapy, his mapping work laid the infrastructure of the field of modern catheter ablation.

In 1980, Dr. Gallagher was appointed Edward S. Orgain Professor of Medicine and mentored or trained numerous students from all corners of the globe (Fig. b). In 1983, he established the electrophysiology division of the Carolinas Heart Institute, and later he remained active in clinical medicine in North Carolina for over 50 years and did missionary work in Nicaragua until his untimely demise. John was uncompromising in his search for excellence, teaching the highest standards of deductive electrophysiology, and imparted this skill to his trainees. They, in turn, became leaders of superlative programs in their countries and remain another important part of his permanent legacy. In recognition of his many contributions, the North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology presented the Distinguished Teacher Award to him in 1999 for outstanding contributions to the field (Fig. b).

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John was a lover of the classics and spoke Russian, Italian, and other Romantic languages which he often employed in his teaching sessions during electrophysiologic procedures. His collaboration with centers in Europe expanded with his many European trainees and particularly with Dr. Guiseppe Critelli of Italy (Fig. c).

In personal pursuits, John was an avid outdoorsman and an accomplished horseman. He is survived by his wife Jane and four children. A warm and generous man, whose candor, incisiveness, and humor were refreshing, he remained a great friend to many of us. John Gallagher will be remembered by all of us as an extraordinary human being, to whom this field owes a great debt of gratitude.

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