

# A Giant in Geriatrics: A Tribute to Professor John Edward Morley

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*“If I have seen further, it is by standing  
 on the shoulders of giants.”*

*Sir Isaac Newton*

Inspiration is an essential feeling to capacitate someone to move from a given perspective to real excellence. Those who inspired so many to achieve excellence in their capacities, and thus, directly, and indirectly helped to move the science of Geriatrics and Gerontology toward excellence deserve a tribute. Professor John Edward Morley is a world-renowned leader in Geriatrics, who educated and trained so many, including experts in the field, but most importantly, have inspired many more people all over the world. This Editorial is dedicated to salute Dr. Morley for his career, his personality, and most of all for his dedication to improve the health care and research of older adults.

Dr. Morley was born on June 13, 1946, in Eshowe, Zululand, South Africa. In 1972, he completed his medical degree at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He came to the United States in 1977 for a fellowship in endocrinology at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) after completing his internal medicine residency. During the 1980s, he worked as an associate professor at the University of Minnesota and as an attending physician and medical director at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, and on the faculty at UCLA where he worked at the Sepulveda VA Medical Center Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC).

One of us (JGO) was working at the Sepulveda GRECC when Dr. Morley arrived to start focusing his career on Geriatrics and Gerontology. It was a hot summer day in the San Fernando Valley, and he had just arrived late the night before from his home country of South Africa. He came into the conference room with a 36-hour stubble beard and a rumpled white shirt under a dark suitcoat – which he removed immediately after coming out of the intense heat. He was sweating and obviously jet lagged. Despite his appearance and fatigue, we had a lively discussion about his passion for endocrinology and nutrition, and his desire to use those interests to improve the care of older people. In subsequent years we became very good friends and colleagues, with a lot of mutual respect, and have collaborated on two of the only medical textbooks that focus on nursing home care.

In 1989, he moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where he lives now. Since then, he has been the Dammert Professor of Gerontology and Director of both the newly established Division of Geriatric Medicine at Saint Louis University Medical Center and the GRECC at the St. Louis VA Medical Center. The Saint Louis Geriatrics programs became a major training and research force under the leadership and charisma of Professor Morley.

Dr. Morley is a multifaceted physician (Figure 1). Throughout his career he has split his time between clinical practice, training students, health-allied professionals, and fellows, doing both experimental and clinical research, authoring articles, and editing journals. As an attending physician, he has always maintained clinical activity, which in fact inspired him to develop several instruments for geriatric assessment. He brought his simplicity and creativity to the clinic. For example, he danced with patients to assess balance and risk of falls, and he assembled a group of older adults to talk to each other to counterbalance isolation and depression (aka the “Circle of Friends Clinic”). He contributed to the better care of older inpatients, especially developing senior-friendly emergency units, delirium units, and training hospital staff about the fundamentals of geriatric medicine applied to a hospital or emergency-based environment. Finally, he has cared for numerous nursing home residents and served as medical director of nursing homes, for which he is well recognized in the American Medical Director Associations (AMDA).

Dr. Morley trained and mentored several individuals who are now expert academic geriatricians in both United States and internationally. He always treated his students and fellows as if they were the most important person in the room, which enchanted many of his mentees. Dr. Morley also supported colleagues from the interdisciplinary team, especially in nursing homes. He was one of the pioneers in utilizing skilled advanced practice professionals, advocated for nurses to participate in the Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine (the American Medical Directors Association (AMDA) Futures Program).

One cannot forget a lecture given by Dr. Morley. He did worldwide education and training. His lectures are famous for being simple, culturally rich, very clear, dynamic, and enthusiastic. He gave thousands of lectures all over the world, not only about his research and ideas, but translating complex

**Figure 1.** Dr. John E. Morley, a multifaceted physician

(a) Around 1989, with the beginning of Saint Louis Geriatrics Division; (b) Present day; (c) Virtual lectures in Covid-19 times; (d) Attending geriatrician; (e) Instrumental for constructing modern geriatrics through several conferences and societies (f) A peaceful moment with his beloved dogs; (g) Dancing with patients to evaluate gait and balance.

geriatric syndromes to more inclusive and strait forward approaches aimed to a better care for older adults.

In research, Dr. Morley was involved in several landmark studies, and has been a leader in many different areas of investigation. He contributed to the study of appetite (1), nutrition (2), and anorexia of aging (3); cachexia and sarcopenia (4); frailty (5, 6); androgen deficiency (7) and testosterone metabolism (8); and experimental models of memory impairment (9) and neuropeptide modulation of hormonal responses and behavior (10). He linked his clinical research to relevant clinical questions and experience. One of the highlights of his career has been the creation, validation, and dissemination of practical clinical instruments to evaluate common geriatric syndromes (11). These tools covered such areas as cognitive impairment (the SLUMS), falls (the Toulouse-St. Louis University Mini Falls), anorexia of aging (the SNAQ), frailty (the FRAIL questionnaire), and sarcopenia (the SARC-F). Many of these have been translated to several languages and are used in Geriatric practice outside the United States. He always delivered the message that using a simple instrument to evaluate a geriatric syndrome is by far better than do nothing about it. His work on the development of

these practical tools is a clear example of his philosophy of translating clinical practice into research, and vice versa.

As an author he published over 1500 publications, 35 books, and hundreds of book chapters. His work has been cited more than 84,000 times and he achieved a h-index of 144. He is certainly one of the most prolific writers in the fields of Geriatrics and Gerontology.

Dr. Morley has also made critical contributions through the development of the modern Geriatric literature as the Editor-in-Chief of major journals of the field such as the *Journals of Gerontology: Medical Sciences* (2000-2005), the *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association* (2006-2017), and the *Journal of Nutrition, Health and Ageing* (2018-2021). As an Editor, his talent to select and invite interesting articles, his dynamic and fast management style, and his inclusive editorial politics welcoming researchers from all parts of the world resulted in the progressive increase in the impact factors of each of these journals. When he left these positions, the journals were much better positioned in the field, and have been able to attract an increasing number of authors and readers.

During his long career, he has won many awards. In 1985, he received the Mead Johnson Award of the American Institution

**Figure 2.** Dr. Morley's family

of Nutrition for appetite regulation research. He won the IPSEN Foundation Longevity Prize in 1999, one of the most prestigious European awards in gerontology research. He was awarded with the Gayle and Richard Olson Prize and the Circle Award from the American Dietetic Association in 2001. The next year, he received the Nascher/Manning Award for his life-long achievements from the American Geriatrics Society. In 2004, the Gerontological Society of America awarded him with the Joseph T. Freeman Award for his work. He received AMDA's Pattee Award for Education Excellence in 2011, the Presidential Award from the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics in 2013, and the Alene Jackson Award by the Aging with Developmental Disabilities Association in 2017. Most recently, he was nominated to the inaugural John E. Morley Award from the AMDA in 2018, and the International Academy Nutrition and Aging (IANA) Award 2020.

Finally, the most important and emblematic point of view of Dr. Morley is who he really is. After his tremendous lifetime professional achievements, John (as he likes to be called) is a "humble and down to earth man, a soft hearted and caring person" as Sue Brooks, who worked with John since 1989, likes to say. John has a passion for people and for Medicine. He likes to meet people, and to really know their stories, just as he has done with his patients. He is a good friend, always helping and always present for them, just as has been with his patients. As we talked to several of John's friends, we kept listening to the same qualities: simplicity, generosity, empathy, honesty, great

heart, and sense of humor.

At 75 years of age, John plans to retire by the end of July 2022. Although this idea is quite awkward to those closer to him, he has good reasons for this. The biggest achievement of John Morley's life is his family (Figure 2). His wife Patricia, his children Robert, Susan, Jacqueline, and many grandchildren. He is going to enjoy more time with them. And not to say more time for his other interests, his dogs, and all the animals he loves to observe in his backyard.

Thanks, John, for everything you have done for so many health professionals and older people, and for the fields of Geriatrics and Gerontology. And thank you for stooping down so many times to allow so many to climb up and stand on your giant shoulders to achieve excellence.

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