In Memoriam: A. Roy Tyrer, Jr 1918-2010

On November 22, 2010, the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) lost a Founding Father, and the neurological community one of its most eminent practitioners.

Mary Louise and Austin Roy Tyrer gave birth to Austin Roy, Jr, on March 30, 1918, in Lexington, Kentucky. The young man would earn his BS degree at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1940, and his MD at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, in 1944 before pursuing postgraduate training, and a neurosurgical career that would span 6 decades. He was a founding member of the partnership of Gotten, Hawkes, and Tyrer, later the Neurosurgical Group of Memphis, PC where he practiced for 40 years. Since 1990, he maintained a solo practice in Memphis, where he saw patients until 2009. Also in Memphis, he was president of the Medical Society, the Board of Health, the Rotary Club, the Executives’ Club, and Junior Achievement. He was instrumental in having a state institution for the mentally impaired built in West Tennessee, and was a life trustee of the United Way. He served as chief of neurosurgery for the Methodist Hospitals of Memphis, and in 1989 was given their Living Award. He was a clinical professor of neurosurgery at the University of Tennessee.

In 1990, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons honored Dr Tyrer for his multiple international, national, state, and local services by choosing him as the fourth recipient of their Humanitarian Award. Among the contributions that this award commended were Dr Tyrer’s active membership on the American Medical Association (AMA) House of Delegates (1967-1991), his 10 years on the AMA Council on Voluntary Health Agencies (including its chairmanship), his 6 years on the AMA Council on Medical Service (an elected position), his membership on the Advisory Committee on Volunteer Physicians in Vietnam, and his 6 years on the President’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. He has been president of the Society of Medical Consultants to the Armed Forces. He also served two tours of duty on the Good Ship Hope. The Egyptian Neurosurgical Society has accorded him honorary membership.

Dr Austin Roy Tyrer, Jr, was one of the 22 young neurosurgeons who met at the Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri, on May 11, 1951 to found the Congress of Neurological Surgeons. He was 33 years old, having just completed postgraduate training at Loma Linda University in California, the Lahey Clinic in Boston, and the University of Tennessee, and having served 2 years in the United States Army as Chief of Neurosurgery at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco, California. He would obtain certification from the American Board of Neurological Surgery the following year in 1952. Dr. Tyrer went on the play a leading role in shaping the new organization, drafting its bylaws, recruiting its early members, guiding its finances, crafting a winning structure for its scientific meetings, and articulating many of the guiding principles that casted contributions of the CNS in subsequent decades. He was more responsible than any of the early leaders for thrusting the CNS into the international development arena, progressive educational offerings and publications,
and socioeconomic issues. He later served as 13th President of the CNS at its Annual Meeting in Denver in 1963. There were 650 members on the CNS roster under his presidency. He lived to celebrate a CNS with more than 6000 members.

At the beginning of his CNS presidential year, Dr Tyrer left immediately from the Houston meeting in October 1962, on a round-the-world trip for the purpose of initiating a neurosurgical volunteer program in India. The success of this international neurosurgical exchange program in India, later Malaysia, and other developing countries, played a significant role in the establishment in 1969 of the Foundation for International Education in Neurosurgery (FIENS). A founding member, Dr Tyrer has served on the FIENS Board since its inception, and was chairman of its Board for 16 years. As part of the 13th Annual CNS meeting in Denver, Colorado, Dr Tyrer oversaw an ambitious scientific program, with Dr James L. Poppen of Boston as Honored Guest, and he demonstrated a keen sense of leadership development by selecting Dr. Richard Schneider, then a young Assistant Professor at Ann Arbor, Michigan, as his Scientific Program Chairman. At that meeting, Dr Tyrer initiated the first closed-circuit telecast of a neurosurgical operation in progress from the operating suite at Presbyterian Hospital, Denver, a remarkable technical feat at that time. During his presidential year, he oversaw publication of the book “Disability and the Law” under the auspices of the CNS, and he initiated the Fee Schedule Questionnaire, the first socioeconomic project undertaken by a neurosurgical organization on behalf of its practitioners.

More than a founding member, Dr Tyrer was truly a father to his beloved CNS. He counseled many presidents over the subsequent half a century, would travel regularly to the CNS Annual Meetings, and he graced his much younger successors with historical vignettes at Past Presidents’ dinners, as recently as 2009, after his 90th birthday. Some years ago, Roy Tyrer insisted on donating his personal desk, tellingly embossed with rich carvings of the CNS logo, to the CNS headquarters in Schaumburg, Illinois, where it is prominently displayed.

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