

HONORING JOHN F. KURTZKE, MD

1926–2015

It is with profound sadness that the administration and the Board of Governors of the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) report the passing of a giant in the world of MS, John F. Kurtzke, MD, on December 1, 2015.

Dr. Kurtzke graduated from Cornell University Medical College in 1952. He began his career in neurology as Chief of the Neurology Service at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, from 1956 to 1963. He then became a professor of neurology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, a position he held from 1963 to 1995. At the time of his death, he held the title of Professor Emeritus at Georgetown.

Most of Dr. Kurtzke's work dealt with MS. In particular, he is widely known for his Expanded Disability Status Scale (EDSS), a method of quantifying disability in MS, and for his pioneering work in the field of neuroepidemiology, a branch of epidemiology he helped to establish in 1967 with Drs. Len Kurland and Milton Alter. The author of more than 200 peer-reviewed articles, he received several awards, including the 1999 Charcot Award from the Multiple Sclerosis International Federation, the 1997 Dystel Prize for MS Research awarded by the American Academy of Neurology, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the CMSC in 2003.

In 2009, the CMSC and the American Academy of Neurology Foundation created the John F. Kurtzke, MD, FAAN, Clinician-Scientist Development Three-Year Award in Multiple Sclerosis, a jointly sponsored fellowship in MS research, "to honor the contributions of Dr. Kurtzke and inspire new MS healthcare professionals to follow in his path." Dr. Kurtzke will be remembered and honored for his commitment to MS and his long service to the health-care community by the CMSC each year during the John F. Kurtzke Memorial Lecture that will open each annual meeting starting in 2016. He will be missed by all who follow in his footsteps.



John F. Kurtzke was a towering figure in MS. His work will live on as long as the search for the cause of and cure for MS continues. He was a pioneering neuroepidemiologist who developed a scale to quantify disability in MS, and he left his mark on everything he touched in MS. His passing leaves a great void in our field.

But John Kurtzke was more than a scientist. He was a very kind and gentle man . . . a real gentleman in an era when that quality is rare. He was a mentor and an inspiration to young clinicians and researchers. He enjoyed attending our CMSC meetings and interacting with medical students, residents, and fellows and reviewing their work. He was a consistent presence at the CMSC Whitaker Track, learning from the work of emerging scholars. He accepted honors and awards with modesty and a big smile. When he received the CMSC's Lifetime Achievement Award (a surprise event), he told several people that he was sure there were others who were more deserving than he.

Dr. Kurtzke was a devoted husband to his lovely wife Peggy, who also attended our CMSC annual meetings and joined Dr. Kurtzke at social events and dinners. Both the Kurtzkes were pleased to see the growth of the comprehensive care approach to MS and the increasing number of national as well as international faculty and delegates at the meetings.

Dr. John F. Kurtzke will long be remembered and honored by the CMSC with memorial lectures at our annual meetings as well as clinician and student fellowships in his name. It will be impossible to fill his footprints, but his work will live on for decades to come. Please rest in peace, Dr. Kurtzke.

—June Halper, MSN, APN-C, MSCN, FAAN
Chief Executive Officer, CMSC