

TRIBUTES TO J. WILLIS HURST, MD

Willis Hurst in Memoriam

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Cardiology lost a giant on October 1, 2011, with the death of Dr. J. Willis Hurst in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Hurst died at Emory University Hospital from complications of a stroke. He was 91 years old.

Willis will best be remembered as the long-term chairman of the Department of Medicine of the Emory University School of Medicine (30 years); as the editor or coeditor with Drs. Bruce Logue, Robert Schlant, and Nanette Wenger of *The Heart*; and as personal physician to President Lyndon Johnson.

In addition to his wife, Nelie (61 years of happy marriage), and 3 sons, John, Jr., Stephen, and Philip, Dr. Hurst's personal passions were teaching, writing, and patient care. Among his teaching awards, he received the Master Teacher Award twice from the American College of Cardiology, the Gifted Teacher Award from the American College of Physicians, and the Pappageorge Award for Excellence in Teaching at Emory. Dr. Hurst created 68 medical books and published 461 scientific articles. *Hurst's The Heart* continues to be the leading textbook in the field of cardiology. One day at the White House to care for President Johnson and the next caring for the poorest patients at Grady Memorial Hospital, Willis Hurst always provided excellent patient care.

Fortunately, he was recognized for his many contributions to the medical profession during his lifetime. Dr. Hurst served as president of the American Heart Association in 1971 and 1972 and as president of the American Society of Professors of Medicine 1985 and 1986. After becoming a member of the Sub-Specialty Board of Cardiovascular Diseases in 1965, he served as chairman of the board from 1967 to 1970. He was a Founder and President of the Paul Dudley White Society in 1974 and was asked to give the memorial address when Dr. White died.

I had the privilege of working with Willis Hurst for 49 years and enjoyed his support and advice as chief of cardiothoracic surgery, as director of the Emory Clinic (of which Dr. Hurst was a founding member), and as vice president for health affairs and director of the Robert W. Woodruff Health Sciences Center.

J. Willis Hurst was a remarkable and unique individual and physician. He should be the ideal role model for all young people who enter the medical profession.

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“Just Being Willis”

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My reflections on Dr. J. Willis Hurst should begin with 2 acknowledgments. First, I am very honored to be asked to write this piece about a man who served as a mentor, adviser, and supporter to me for the past 30 years. Second, I borrowed the title for my reflections from my good friend Wayne Alexander. When Wayne assumed the chairmanship of the Emory University Department of Medicine, Dr. Hurst inquired as to how he could continue to effectively contribute to the department. Wayne responded that Dr. Hurst would be the most help by “just being Willis.” This article is about my reflections on what it meant for Dr. Hurst to “just be Willis.” It is not written to remind you of his many outstanding accomplishments, such as the following: being selected by Dr. Paul Dudley White to be 1 of his final 2 cardiology fellows; assuming the chairmanship of the Department of Medicine at Emory University at age 35 and remaining chairman for 30 years; being chosen by President Lyndon Johnson as his personal cardiologist and becoming the president's close friend; being selected as the president of the American Heart Association; and giving birth to the most widely read, authoritative textbook on heart disease and one that continues to bear his name.

Instead, in this article I focus on the more private side of this esteemed public figure. It is about a man who awakened in the early morning hours to allow himself time to think and plan in silence. Dr. Hurst believed that for a person to reach his or her full potential, he or she must allow moments of solitude and silence, uninterrupted by the disruptions of daily life. “Being Willis” meant being annoyed by the seemingly constant screeching of cell phones and pagers. “Being Willis” provoked him to expound the fact that these interruptions were not conducive to good medical care, because they hinder logical thought progression and divert the physician's attention from the patient.

“Being Willis” also meant being the first faculty physician rounding in the hospital each day. These early rounds were not visits to patients' rooms but rather visits to the nursing stations. In discussions with the nurses, Willis gained insight into the demeanor, cooperativeness, and commitment of his house officers. These visits alerted him to a house officer's inadequate documentation or a lack of clarity in thought processes. “Being Willis” meant proceeding from these early morning rounds to “morning report,” beginning at 6:45 AM. Demanding punctuality from a tardy house officer, with the curt reminder that arriving late was

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