OBITUARY

Obituary

Douglas J. Pritchard MD (1937–2011)

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Douglas J. Pritchard MD was a giant among orthopaedic oncologists (Fig. 1). His passing reflects the loss of a gentle leader in our field, a founding member of the Musculoskeletal Tumor Society, and an individual who was instrumental in shaping the modern practice of orthopaedic oncology.

Doug was born on Christmas Day, 1937 in Kewanee, Illinois and raised in Des Moines, Iowa with his two brothers. A voracious reader all his life, he first mastered comic books by age 10 and as an adult effortlessly dispensed with the New York Times crossword puzzle before starting surgery. Growing up in a home filled with music, Doug was an accomplished trombonist by age 12 and leader of his own dance band as a teenager. But the activity during his youth that most changed his life was delivering newspapers.

Owing to his years of outstanding service as a paperboy, the Des Moines Register and Tribune awarded him the prestigious “Paperboy’s Scholarship” which took him from Iowa to New Hampshire for high school at Phillips Exeter Academy. He excelled in academics and was accepted at Harvard College. After completing his undergraduate studies, he remained in Boston at Tufts Medical School and performed his general surgery internship in Hartford, Connecticut.

After medical school, Doug served in the army and attained the rank of captain. Thereafter he began his orthopaedic residency at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and on completion of his training in 1972 was

Fig. 1 Douglas J. Pritchard MD. (Photo courtesy of Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved.)

invited to join the staff of Mayo Clinic. He became a Professor of Orthopedic Surgery in 1984 and led the orthopaedic oncology section at Mayo from 1980 to 1999. He retired from surgery in 2000 and fully retired from clinical practice in 2005.

During Doug’s distinguished career at Mayo he authored or coauthored more than 200 academic publications, was pivotal in the development of treatment protocols for pediatric patients with sarcoma through the Childrens Cancer Study Group, and trained and mentored numerous orthopaedic oncologists and residents in the Mayo program. He collaborated extensively with the ‘Mayo Team’ of Franklin H. Sim MD, Thomas Shives MD, Mike Rock MD, Edmund Y.S. Chao PhD, Krishnan K. Unni MD and many medical and radiation oncologists. His focus was always on the needs of the patient. He routinely gave his home telephone number to his patients with

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Fig. 2 Doug and his wife Janice are shown in this photograph taken in 1999 during the Mayo Clinic Orthopedic Oncology course in Hawaii. (Photo published courtesy of Mrs. Janice Pritchard.)

sarcoma. During the span of his 33-year career, thousands of patients received his compassionate and thoughtful care.

Ewings sarcoma was always a particular focus for Doug and the current management of such patients is related to his research. In 1986 he and coauthors Ross Wilkins MD, E.O. Burgert Jr MD, and Krishnan K. Unni MD, published a landmark paper in *Cancer* on the Mayo experience with 140 patients with Ewings sarcoma of bone. The study showed the complete surgical excision of the primary tumor improved 5-year survival (74% vs. 34%) and recommended that patients with surgically accessible lesions undergo complete excision combined with chemotherapy and, in selected patients, also radiation therapy. Doug chaired the Bone Tumor Strategy Committee at the Childrens Cancer Study Group from 1981 to 1989.

Doug's leadership positions included serving as President of the Musculoskeletal Tumor Society, Associate and Deputy Editor at the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, and Chair of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgery Instructional Course Lectures committee. Locally he was active in the Rotary Club of Rochester, MN, which honored him as a Paul Harris Fellow—an individual who met the high professional and personal standards of the organization and was devoted to 'service above self'. The Rotarians could not have selected a more appropriate individual for this honor.

During medical school, Doug met Janice Marie Dobrowolski RN, in the hospital cafeteria and it was love at first sight (Fig. 2). They wed in 1963 and raised three children, Lisa (Doug) Bayley of Red Wing, MN, Beth of Rochester, MN, and John (Zoei) of Rochester, MN. The love and pride Doug had for his wife, children, and three grandchildren were evident to all (Fig. 3). However, he also was a disciplinarian with his children. I recall being at

Fig. 3 The Pritchard family taken in 2010. (Photo published courtesy of Mrs. Janice Pritchard.)

the Pritchard's home on a Sunday evening and Doug was awaiting a phone call from Lisa. His steadfast rule as the children left home for college and various travels was the requirement that they telephone home every Sunday evening regardless of their location in the world. I too have adopted this rule with my children.

As a host of Journal Club, residents and fellows were warmly welcomed into the Pritchard home. One could not help but notice the extensive bookcases (many custom made) throughout the house. There were books everywhere. Doug was an avid reader and loved to share good books. His favorite book was 'Moby Dick' by Herman Melville. He also had quite a green thumb and residents on the Pritchard service during the summer benefited from this talent as Doug shared with them bounty from his backyard garden.

After retirement he had more opportunity to enjoy his passion for fishing and spending time on his beloved Lake Okoboji, near Arnold's Park where he often visited his grandparents as a child. Doug's battle with liver cancer and Parkinson's disease was dignified and inspiring to all. Despite his ill health and severe affliction from Parkinson's disease, he continued to participate in alumni events during the last year of his life. As Peter Choong MD, told me at such a meeting, if you simply closed your eyes and just listened to Doug's words you would hear in them the same clarity of thought and wisdom he shared with so many of us during the years.

Douglas J. Pritchard MD was a great and gentle man, an outstanding teacher, a wonderful mentor, a compassionate surgeon, and loving husband and father. His dry sense of humor was always engaging and he took great pride in being a Mayo Clinic orthopaedic surgeon and training so many outstanding orthopaedic oncologists. We have lost a great friend.