Profiles in Cardiology

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Harriet P. Dustan

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Cardiovascular medicine and the world hypertension research community sadly lost one of its major forces on June 27, 1999, with the death of Dr. Harriet Pearson Dustan (Fig. 1). A long and tireless leader of the American Heart Association, Dr. Dustan personally contributed to its vitality and strength and to the role of voluntary health organizations in healthcare research.

Born in Craftsbury Common, Vermont, she received her early education at the Craftsbury Academy and then attended the University of Vermont for her undergraduate and medical degrees. After her postgraduate training in internal medicine at the Mary Fletcher Hospital and at the Royal Victoria Hospital, in Montreal, she returned to the University of Vermont's Bishop DeGrasbriand Hospital to help establish a medical student teaching program. She came to the Research Division of the Cleveland Clinic in 1948 to begin a productive and illustrious career in hypertension with Drs. Irvine H. Page and Arthur C. Corcoran. Dr. Dustan's research work began at the Cleveland Clinic with the early antihypertensive drugs. Some of these agents are now only of importance to pharmacologic history. All were very vital stepping stones in the development of the broad armamentarium of agents that we now have to prevent and reverse the tremendous morbidity and mortality associated with hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases. Hers was one of the first reports to demonstrate reversal of the course of malignant hypertension. Working with a remarkable team of radiological, renal, cardiovascular, and

pathology specialists, she participated in the development and demonstration of selective renal arteriography as the standard of reference for the demonstration of renal arterial disease as the major remediable form of hypertension. Their longitudinal studies of patients with renal arterial disease in the 1960s identified the various forms of atherosclerotic and fibrosing renal arterial lesions; and their careful studies permitted an arteriographic and pathologic correlation and the elucidation of the natural history of these various diseases. Her studies, in the early days of plasma renin activity measurement, permitted a correlation of the relationship between the plasma concentration of this enzyme and the role of intravascular volume and other factors in various clinical forms of hypertensive diseases. Personally, I believe her recent reports hypothesizing the relationship between keloid formation and hypertensive renal arteriolar lesions in black patients will be shown to be of great fundamental importance.

After many productive years in Cleveland, she moved to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1977 to direct the Cardiovascular Research and Training Center of the University of Alabama School of Medicine. It was there that she directed the research activities of the Specialized Center of Hypertension and, later, became inaugural editor of *Hypertension*. She was named Distinguished Faculty Lecturer of the University of Alabama in Birmingham in 1984 and, in 1987, University Distinguished Professor. She was also appointed Distinguished Physician of the Veterans Administration at the Birmingham VA Medical Center in 1987.

Dr. Dustan returned to her home in Vermont in 1990 where she continued to serve her alma mater. She had been a member earlier of the University of Vermont's Board of Trustees, and on her retirement continued to participate actively in the University's Departments of Medicine, Pharmacology, and Physiology. For service to her University she received the honorary degree of Doctor of Science, and was so honored by Cleveland State University and the Medical College of Pennsylvania. She also received the Doctor of Humane Letters from St. Michael's College in Vermont. For her long-standing work in the hypertensive field, Dr. Dustan was invited to serve on the Advisory Panel of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health.

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FIG. 1 Harriet P. Dustan, M.D. (1920–1999).

During this tenure she was Co-Chairman of the Hypertension Research Task Force. Later, she chaired the Joint National Committee's Third Report on the Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of Hypertension.

Throughout her long career, Dr. Dustan was a tireless leader and advocate of the American Heart Association. She worked for many years on its research committee, finally chairing this important activity. Other important responsibilities were with its first ethics committee and the administrative

reconstruction of the organization. She was President of the American Heart Association from 1976 to 1977. Following her tenure with the Association, she agreed to establish the journal *Hypertension* and served as its first editor. She was a strong advocate for the role of its pharmaceutical roundtable for donation of therapeutic agents to the nation's underserved population. For her long-standing service to the American Heart Association and to the Council for High Blood Pressure Research, she received the Gold Heart Award of the Association, the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Council, and the President's Award of the Northeast Ohio Affiliate. Harriet Dustan worked tirelessly on behalf of most professional and other organizations to which she belonged. She was the first woman to be named to the board of the American Board of Internal Medicine and the Board of Regents of the American College of Physicians, chairing the Residency Review committee. For her service to these organizations and for her contributions in establishing the principles that underlie the successful treatment of hypertension that led to the decrease in the death rates and improved health for the millions of hypertensive Americans, she was awarded the Scientific Achievement Award of the American Medical Association in 1988, the John Phillips Memorial Award from the American College of Physicians in 1994, and the Distinguished Service Award of the American College of Cardiology in 1998.

All of us who have known and worked with Dr. Dustan, and enjoyed her warm personality, keen intellect, delightful sense of humor, and unusual style will miss her friendship and her continued contributions. For those who never had the privilege of knowing Dusty personally, they and those who will follow on in their footsteps will be the beneficiaries of her major service to her fellow man. We shall all miss you!