

Announcement



November 19, 2014

It is with great sorrow that we share the news of the passing of one of The Ohio State University's most innovative and remarkable physicians, Ernest Johnson, MD, who established our Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) in 1963. Dr. Johnson died Tuesday, Nov. 18 at Rehabilitation Services at Dodd Hall.

Dr. Johnson was on the faculty here at the medical center for more than 55 years – until his death – and served as PM&R chair for 37 of those years (1963 – 1989). Under his guidance, the department became one of the leading programs in the country. Dr. Johnson was a foremost authority on electromyography, a diagnostic tool that measures electrical impulses in muscle. His life's work was dedicated to treating patients with amputation, brain injury, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury and stroke.

The true development of our Rehabilitation Services at Dodd Hall can be attributed to Dr. Johnson's efforts to improve the lives of those with physical disabilities. Additionally, Dr. Johnson co-founded "Creative Living," the apartment complex south of the medical center for physically disabled adults who need some assistance but still desire to live on their own. When the first Creative Living apartments opened in September 1974, they were the nation's first privately developed housing facility for the physically disabled.

Dr. Johnson was acknowledged internationally as a preeminent physiatrist, helping to co-found the Association of Academic Physiatrists in 1967.

Along the way, he instructed more than 300 psychiatry residents, instilling in them the patient-first philosophy that characterized his career. To honor him, graduates of the residency program established the Dr. Ernest W. Johnson Chair in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. Many of them can tell stories of his insistence that they learn how to do a "wheelie" in a wheelchair, to really understand what their patients are going through. Those lessons earned Dr. Johnson the nickname "Chief Wheelie."

Dr. Johnson received his undergraduate degree from Ohio State in 1948 and his medical degree from Ohio State's College of Medicine in 1952. He completed his residency, also at Ohio State, in 1957 and was named an assistant professor in the College of Medicine that year. He was most recently Professor Emeritus in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

During his illustrious career, he received the Frank H. Krusen, MD, Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, the Henry B. Betts Award and the Alumni Professional Achievement Award from The Ohio State University; was president of the American Association of Electromyography and Electrodiagnosis and of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; and organized the Ohio Wheelchair Athletic Association.

We mourn the passing of a pioneer in the world of physical medicine and rehabilitation, a beloved leader, mentor and friend. We extend our condolences to Dr. Johnson's family and to his many colleagues and associates.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Dr. Johnson's memory to the OSU Wexner Medical Center's Ernest W. Johnson MD Residency Support Fund. Checks should be made payable to The OSU Foundation and sent to OSUWMC Development, Kyle Sebastian, 660 Ackerman Road, Columbus OH 43218. In the check memo line, please write: "in memory of Dr. Ernest Johnson."