# Thomas P. Duffy, MD 1937-2022

## Memorial published in the 2023 Transactions of the American Clinical and Climatological Association.

## Jerry L. Spivak, MD, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Thomas Patrick Duffy, a revered Yale Medical School faculty member, passed away on October 28th, 2022. During a tenure of 46 years, Tom was treasured as a charismatic teacher, an eloquent lecturer, a master clinician, and a compassionate physician. In recognition, at his retirement in 2014, the clinical component of the Yale Hematology Division was named the Duffy Service.

In addition to enriching the lives of several generations of medical students, physicians, and fellows in training, as well as his patients, Tom had a passion for medical history, especially as it related to Sir William Osler, medical ethics, end-of-life care, and the role of humanities in medical education, all of which formed the basis of his clinical scholarship. His scholarship was also informed by his personal experiences during his medical training on the Osler Medical Service at Johns Hopkins.

Tom was born on March 17th, 1937, in Brooklyn, New York. He was exposed to the study of the Classics in high school and carried an interest in their study for the rest of this life. He received a BS degree from Saint Peters College (now University) in 1958. He received an MD degree in 1962 from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and training in internal medicine from 1962-1965 on the Osler Medical Service at Johns Hopkins Hospital. In 1965, he was a postdoctoral fellow in Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. In 1968, after two years' service as a Captain at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Tom returned to Johns Hopkins as a postdoctoral fellow in Hematology. In 1970, he was appointed Chief Resident on the Osler Medical Service, a position that carried a storied history. The significance of this appointment cannot be understated given the future arc of Tom's professional career.

The Osler Medical Service, the creation of William Osler, the initial physician-in-chief at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, was the first residency program in the United States where physicians training in internal medicine lived in the hospital during their training period. By the time Tom joined the program, the residency requirement was no longer in place, though interns and residents still had to live in close proximity to the hospital for quick access to their patients if the need arose.

The Osler Medical Service was housed in its own building and served the indigent, as stipulated by the philanthropist Johns Hopkins. Originally, the program had a pyramidal structure with interns, first and second year residents, and at the top of the pyramid, the Osler Resident, who had additional postgraduate training in his field of choice. Since no clinical fees were charged, the intern was the patient's physician of record, carefully supervised by both first year and second year residents. The rigor of the program was widely acknowledged as was its clinical excellence.

The Osler Resident was not only responsible for the quality of patient care on the Osler Medical Service, for which he made evening rounds with the interns on every newly admitted patient, any unstable patients or those who were diagnostic enigmas; he was also responsible for giving three teaching sessions weekly for the Osler house staff, while providing internal medicine consultations for all the non-medicine services in the hospital 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Osler Medical Service was designed to train physicians who would populate leadership positions in academic medicine, and it was successful, but at what price? As we shall see below, Tom Duffy was the first to ask and answer this question.

In 1971, at the completion of his year as the Osler Resident, Tom accepted an appointment as an Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Hematology Division at Johns Hopkins. In 1975, he was appointed Associate Director of the Office of Continuing Education at the University. In 1976, Tom made the most important professional decision of his career, when he was recruited by Samuel Thier (ACCA 2000), Chief of Medicine at Yale Medical School, to join its Hematology Division, leaving Johns Hopkins after an association spanning 16 years.

If Hopkins was the crucible in which Tom's clinical excellence was forged, Yale was the incubator in which his clinical teaching and scholarship flourished. He was chairman of the Department of Medicine's Clinical Education Committee for twelve years, and Director of the Hematology Division Fellowship Program for 29 years. In 1982, Tom was a founding member of the Ethics Committee at the Yale New Haven Hospital and was its chairman for 19 years. In 2008, he was appointed an Ethicist Scholar at the Yale Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics, and also served as a committee member of the Conniff-Dixon Foundation, which recognizes outstanding end of life care by physicians. Tom was also a member of Fellowships at Auschwitz for the study of Professional Ethics at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and on the national boards of Americares, and Health in Harmony, the former dedicated to health improvement in underserved areas, the latter to relief from global warming.

The extent to which Tom was revered as a teacher during his career is manifest by the accolades he received from various constituencies: In 1973, the George J. Stuart Award for Outstanding Clinical Teacher, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine: in 1980, the Francis Gilman Blake Award for outstanding teacher of the medical sciences, Yale University School of Medicine; in 1990, the Bhomfalk Teaching Award, Yale University School of Medicine; 1994, the Yale Medical House Staff Award for Outstanding Teacher of the Year; in 2002, invited lecturer, Great Clinical Teacher Series, National Institutes of Health; in 2003, the George Thornton Award, American College of Physicians, Outstanding Clinical Teacher, and in 2003, the Yale New Haven Medical House staff Award, Best Clinical Teacher.

Eloquence was an important component of Tom's success as a teacher as demonstrated by the remarkable demand for him as a commencement speaker, which was as true at Johns Hopkins as it was at Yale: Commencement speaker, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, *The Wound and the Bow*, 1977; commencement speaker, Yale University School of Medicine, *Creativity in the Physician's Life*, 1979; commencement speaker, Yale University School of Medicine, *Stories in the Physician's Life*, 1990, and commencement speaker, Yale University School of Medicine, *Musings on Birdsongs*, 1995.

To these can be added honorific lectures at Yale and Hopkins: In 1992, the Dobihal Lecture; *The Center Does Not Hold,* Yale University School of Medicine; in 1994, the Robert Penn Warren Lecture, *Mentors in Medicine and Literature*, Yale University School of Medicine, and in 2015, the 12th Annual Miller Lecture, *Grace,* Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Tom's scholarly contributions to the role of ethics in medical education and clinical practice were as important as his leadership positions in medical ethics at Yale. He published a vade mecum on integrating clinical ethical reasoning into the paradigm of clinical medical reasoning at the bedside (1), wrote about physician attitudes toward physician-assisted suicide (2), and the unintentional pitfalls thereof (3), and was a guest author in a multi-authored 2008 reprise to the provocative 1978 novel, *the House of God*, that focused on the changes in medical residency training in the 30 years since that consequential novel, in response to its description of the dehumanization and psychological harm experienced during such training. Finally, in a prescient 1992 publication, Duffy looked ahead at the "progressive graying" of America, and how the potential of health care rationing might impact on the practice of hematology and oncology (4).

Tom was also passionate about the important role of the humanities in medical education. In 1999, he became the Director of the Program for Humanities in Medicine at Yale Medical School, which established the Yale Medical Symphony, and offered programs in the Arts and Humanities to complement the Medical School curriculum. He was also a Fellow of the Whitney Humanity Center at Yale University, which focused on cross-disciplinary scholarly exchange. Similar to his initiative to integrate ethical considerations into clinical medical reasoning, Tom also sought to integrate humanism into that daily hospital staple, medical ward rounds (5).

Importantly, Tom's passion about the role of the humanities in the clinical practice of medicine was informed by his education in the classics. He made this clear in his written essay in his Hopkins admission application, *"The profession of medicine demands that a man be a good student. Having been a classics student in high school, I availed myself of the science courses at St. Peter's College. My curriculum contains all the necessary sciences and also places great emphasis on the humanities"* – a bold statement considering the emphasis on science as the essential prerequisite for medical school admission in that era, largely as a consequence of the Flexner Report. A consequence that Tom would later decry, while references to Classical literature permeate Tom's lectures and his publications.

For example, in his Johns Hopkins Medical School commencement address entitled "*the Wound and the Bow*", Tom uses Sophocles' play *Philoctetes* to illustrate the importance of trust and caring in the physician-patient relationship. In a treatise entitled, "*Agamemnon's Fate and the Medical Profession*" discussing the physician-patient interaction with respect to patient autonomy (6), Duffy uses the myth about Agamemnon's fate to argue that "*what is transcendent* [in the physician's] *role is that special moral imperative that pervades every encounter in the doctor-patient relationship."* And further, "*Every medical act involving a patient is an ethical act with the end of medicine always being beneficence; the moral imperative of beneficence is the backdrop against which any medical imperative is performed. This has been the ethos of medicine from ancient times to the present."*

Similarly, the Classical approach to learning pervaded Tom's didactic approach to medical diagnosis.

Medical students today can still benefit from Tom's clinical acumen in a New England Journal of Medicine series "*Clinical Reasoning*" of which Tom was one of the initiators. In this series, in which Tom was involved between 1992 and 1995, the moderator interrogates a skilled clinician in a Socratic dialogue about an enigmatic patient. This discussion was headlined by an enticing rubric, to illustrate the pertinent medical principle involved, which Tom would explain at length. Unsurprisingly, Tom's first offering was entitled "*When to let go*", in which he addressed end-of-life decisions (7).

The enticing rubrics were reminiscent of the mysterious titles of the Sherlock Holmes stories written by Arthur Conant Doyle, himself a physician, whose protagonist, Holmes, was modeled after an astute clinical teacher of Doyle. Tom's choice of rubrics, of course, was not a coincidence, since Tom was a member of the Sherlock Holmes Society, the Baker Street Irregulars, and wrote an invited chapter about the relationship of Osler to Doyle in a volume entitled, "*Osler's Bedside Library: Great Writers Who Inspired a Great Physician."*

Having survived the Osler residency pyramid and its rigors, Tom commented in his article, *Glory Days: what price glory?*, "*I survived the whittling. I triumphed by being singled out to become the Osler chief resident, confidant of the chief, ennobled and indentured."* (8). Remarkably, however, Tom then goes on to assert that Osler's prescription of "*aequanimitas"*, the detachment of concern necessary in the doctor-patient relationship, without acknowledging the potential impact of tragic clinical encounters on physicians, could be a recipe for posttraumatic stress, a syndrome not limited to military veterans, as evidenced currently by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on both medical and paramedical professionals.

This important observation was expanded by Tom's analysis of the Flexner Report, which had transformed American medical education in 1910. The Flexnerian model was based on the hyper-rational German model of medical education, where excellence in science was paramount, but what Duffy termed "*the ethos of medicine*" was lost. Ironically, while Johns Hopkins Medical School was the prototype to which Flexner compared all other US medical schools, the Oslerian emphasis on "patient beneficence" was not appreciated by Flexner. (9)

Later in his career, Tom returned to this issue as it related to end-of-life issues. As mentioned above, he encouraged the study of clinical ethics in parallel with the study of clinical medical skills. In a publication entitled, "*The Medical Student and Care at the End of Life*," Tom explained how medical students can play an important role through medical history taking, which, properly done, elicits the full story of the patient's life and goals, furthering the role of patient autonomy, which was lost in Flexner's view of medical education (10).

In his Hopkins Medical School admission essay, Tom describes his view of the medical profession as follows: "*A doctor must possess a broad intelligence, strong moral values, maturity, social ability and initiative. I have tried during my days at school to develop these qualities and with dedication, perseverance and sacrifice will make the profession of medicine my life's work."* In light of these comments, it fascinating to learn Tom's view of his own career after his 2014 retirement, in a 2015 lecture at Hopkins. The occasion, ironically, was the annual Miller Lecture, which celebrates the establishment of an institute for clinical excellence at Hopkins, where clinical excellence, as Tom noted,

was always "*part of its very fiber*".

The title of Tom's lecture was "*Grace*", not the religious variety, but rather, a humanistic one of reaching outside oneself to care for another. Tom's conception of a medical career was *"the richest life that any human being can live – if they choose it for the right reasons."* This richness for Tom came from "*repeated moments of grace as a result of my life in caring for other human beings."* Viewed from this perspective, Tom's career is better defined by a quotation of Dickens, rather than one from Osler: "*Mankind was my business, charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence were, all, my business."*

Tom is survived by his wife Susan, three sons, Conor, Eamon and Liam, two grandchildren, Athena Emily and Thomas Paris, two daughters-in-law, Nicole Bikakis and Jackie Deliligati, his sister Patricia and her husband, Joseph.

Jerry L. Spivak, MD, MACP

## References


1. Kaldjian LC, Weir RF, Duffy TP. A clinician's approach to clinical ethical reasoning. J Gen Intern Med 2005;20:306-11.
2. Kaldjian LC, Jekel JF, Bernene JL, Rosenthal GE, Vaughan-Sarrazin M, Duffy TP. Internists' attitudes towards terminal sedation in end of life care. J Med Ethics 2004;30:499-503.
3. Duffy TP. Physician assistance in dying: a subtler slippery slope. Hastings Cent Rep 2014; 44:1p following 48.
4. Duffy TP. Rationing health care: its impact and implications for hematology-oncology. Yale J Biol Med 1992;65:75-82.
5. Kirkpatrick JN, Nash K, Duffy TP. Well rounded. Arch Intern Med 2005;165:613-6.
6. Duffy TP. Agamemnon's fate and the medical profession. West New Engl Law Rev 1987;9:21-30.
7. Duffy TP. When to let go. N Engl J Med 1992;326:933-5.
8. Duffy TP. Glory days. What price glory? Pharos Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Med Soc 2005;68:22-30.
9. Duffy TP. The Flexner Report--100 years later. Yale J Biol Med 2011;84:269-76.
10. Duffy TP. The medical student and care at the end of life. Virtual Mentor 2013;15:672-6.