

Ernest M. Burgess, MD, PhD, 1911–2000

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Ernest M. Burgess, MD, PhD. Dr. Burgess' pioneering contributions to Prosthetic Medicine and the care of amputees for over half a century cannot be duplicated. We will miss his warm personality, good humor, and never-ending enthusiasm for advancing orthopedic/prosthetic knowledge.

The Dawn Has Come

Dudley S. Childress

Few seem to believe in noblesse oblige anymore, or know what it means but Ernest Burgess knew; out-reaching the globe earnestly teaching amputation and prosthetics methods because he believed the philosophers who say the purpose of life is to create enthusiasm.

We don't have many Renaissance Men anymore, too much to know and do but Burgess clearly belonged as surgeon, scholar, scientist, sculptor, swimmer, poet, politician, master mechanic of Seattle Foot, and more.

An orthopaedic surgeon's skills are difficult to master some say as difficult as passing under the scalpel's edge. We want them to know, like Michaelangelo, how to shape the body form, as Burgess did.

A scholar, he studied late his cases, wrote his manuscripts scarcely needing to change a jot or tittle, listening to Mahler and Mozart at midnight reading Rumi—Burgess, the man who made ablation an art form.

Burgess fitted new limbs immediately, post-surgically, and proved automatized fabrication



of mobility aids.

He engineered a new class of feet with long curved keels structured like the sailing ships that once plied Puget Sound.

Vigorous, vital youth of Utah cultured by a benevolent medical alma mater, the Lake Washington swimmer made his mark as Seattle and world surgeon blessed with deft political touch and the innate ability to press progress without losing his graceful gait.

The Burgess mind was incisive, cutting to core, logical, practical, yet prophetic and poetic, guided by the heart

for he had learned (from Tagore)
"A mind all logic is like a knife all blade.
It makes the hand bleed that uses it."

His mild, modulated voice was warm,
friendly like the water surrounding Bora Bora
and as calming to patients and kin as balm.
The inner man was as soft as
South Pacific sand, always seeking
"to care for those who had borne the battle."

But he could be as tough as coconut shells,
for no one could accomplish or
alter the landscape of a field
as he did—
through prosthetics research
study, surgical science,
mentoring, and merit review—
without difficulty or opposition.

Near last of a line
of superb World War II orthopedic surgeons,
he knew all the great ones
who fostered rehabilitation—was one.
He knew the father of
VA medical care—won his award.
Yet most what mattered was
that he knew the veterans.

Even the doctor dies, we know,
but Dr. Ernest Burgess also knew,
like his teacher Tagore, that
"Death is not extinguishing the light;
it is putting out the lamp
because the dawn has come."

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