

HENRY S. WENTZ, M.D.

1921-2020



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Editor's Note: From time to time, this journal is privileged to publish remembrances of recently departed physicians who have had an important impact on our profession and our community. Henry Wentz was just such an individual, and his life, as recounted by his friend, student, and colleague Nik Zervanos, contains lessons of importance to us all.

Dr. Henry S. Wentz was born in Leola, Lancaster County, on March 14, 1921, and died on Jan. 5, 2020, just short of his 99th birthday, after sustaining a fractured hip just two weeks earlier. Till then he was generally healthy with clear mind and vibrant spirit, was grateful to be free of physical discomforts, and still attended breakfast meetings of the "Grumps," an organization of retired physicians.

He was proud to be the eighth generation descendent of Peter Wens, a k a, Wentz, who came from England to Montgomery County in 1704.

The "Farmstead," built by Peter's son, was used as a headquarters by George Washington after the Battle of Germantown in the Revolutionary War.

His mother's Mennonite family came from Switzerland in 1732. Her father Henry Stauffer founded Stauffer and sons, a coal, lumber and feed business. A man of deep faith, with strong values of right and wrong, he had a profound influence on Henry.

Henry is the fourth generation of Wentz family physicians. He was precocious and was preschooled, allowing him to skip early grades. He also had musical talent, and learned piano, but preferred popular music to the classical piano he was initially trained in, so he switched to the trumpet and became the leader of his school band at age 14. After he retired, he resumed playing trumpet with his 10-year-old grandson.

Henry entered Duke University at age 16, and

despite his age, displayed leadership qualities that resulted in his becoming president of his fraternity and its representative in intercollegiate Greek-fraternity events. He met Mary Louise Whitney at Duke, and it was love at first sight. Graduating with honors in 1941 (one year before Mary), he entered Jefferson Medical College, and married Mary during his junior year. (His romantic courtship and marriage are described in their charming book, *A Journey of Love*, which describes their years in medical practice, family and home life, church and community service.)

Henry graduated AOA in September 1944, and spent 18 months at Lancaster General Hospital in a combined internship and medical residency. Following a two-year commitment with the U.S. Army, he returned to Lancaster in 1948 to begin a solo general practice in Strasburg.

In those days members of the medical staff staffed the clinics and inpatient services for indigent patients. Henry was the only general practitioner honored to serve as an attending on the "Ward Service." I was fortunate to have him as my attending when I was an intern in 1962-1963, and he impressed me with his wide medical knowledge and his concern for our patients. He was intent that I received an excellent learning experience.

While I was on his service, he invited Diana and me to his home. His office was in the lower level of his house, and it had its own separate driveway with a hitching post for Amish patients. He was accessible and available to them, and routinely made house calls. He also managed a busy office schedule, and cared for his own patients in the hospital, having given up maternity care. I was so impressed with the level of support from his beautiful and gracious wife, Mary. As busy as he was, he also tried to have dinner with his wife and two children every day. His commitment to his patients was exemplary: before we had answering



Dr. Henry Wentz was 98 when he attended the 50th anniversary celebration of the Family Medicine Residency Program Sept. 14, 2019.

services or cell phones, he had a lady who answered his phone and took messages when he was away.

This experience helped to solidify my desire to be a family physician, and I wished to emulate Henry's dedication to his patients and his profession. He was not only my mentor, but a role model.

In 1969, when I established the residency program in family medicine, an approved residency had to provide training in a typical family practice setting. Henry helped to create a unique family practice teaching unit in Quarryville, in what is now the Walter L. Aument Family Health Center. In order to leave his practice on a half time basis to become my first associate, he invited Ivan Leaman to join his practice in Strasburg. For Ivan it was a dream come true. He recalls Henry as an exemplary old-fashioned family doctor, always striving to learn. Henry was Ivan's doctor, teacher, and mentor.

Our residents also remember him as an exceptional teacher and mentor. Dr. Harold Kraybill remembers one of his unique teaching tools: "As we walked down the hall to see patients, he would pull notecards from his shirt pocket and quickly shuffle through them, locating one specifically for a teaching moment with me. He had picked up something from reviewing charts or something he observed that needed improvement. His comments were corrective, but always affirming. Even before we met, he had already prepared what he wanted to tell me. No other instructor did this."

In 1974, he founded the Eastbrook Family Health Center with Drs. Ivan Leaman, John Rutt, and Harold Kraybill. They soon added Drs. James Wilson, J. Donald Siegrist, and J. Clair Hess. Ivan described Henry as a strong medical director, "a model intellectual leader who combined integrity with compassion. He treated the practice as a marriage, and by his example showed what it took to work together. He had a gentle, but persuasive way to point out when there might be a better way to manage a medical situation." Don Siegrist recalled that "at the end of a day, as Henry was leaving the office, he would usually pause at my door and briefly offer a thoughtful comment,

acknowledge something he appreciated, or give a word of encouragement."

Henry had natural leadership skills, and a willingness to take on increasing levels of responsibility. Aside from being the medical director of the Eastbrook practice, from 1974-78 he also served as chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine, and in 1982 was President of the Lancaster County Medical Society.

Perhaps because of his deep family roots in Lancaster medicine, he was one of the co-founders of Lancaster's Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation in 1982 and was its president in 1991 at a crucial time. There is a wonderful audio covering this phase of his career when Dr. Lawrence Bonchek interviewed Dr. Wentz in 2009. It's accessible on this Journal's website,¹ and that of the Edward Hand Medical Museum.

He also wrote articles about prominent Lancaster physicians of the past for *Lancaster Medicine*,² which unfortunately is no longer published, for the Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society,³ and for the centennial celebration of Lancaster General Hospital in 1993. The resulting book, which contains personal interviews with physicians, nurses, and members of the hospital administration, as well

as descriptions of the diseases and their treatment (including surgical procedures) during the early 20th century, as well as his many other writings, including *A Journey of Love*, are accessible through the website of the Edward Hand Medical Museum.

One of his other crowning achievements was the book, *Patients are a Virtue*,⁴ a collection of colorful stories about his practice in Amish Country. One Amish patient who had recovered from a long illness, when hearing that his bill wasn't yet prepared, wrote out a blank check, saying: "Henry, I trusted you with my life, I don't see why I can't trust you with my money." More than 8,000 of these books have been sold.

Henry and Mary served on a medical mission in Honduras and the Dominican Republic, and he also devoted time away from his busy practice to work on



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an Indian Reservation in both North Dakota and Montana.

He was a member of the Lions Club of Strasburg and served on the board of directors of the Lampeter-Strasburg School District, while maintaining an active role in his church as a lay leader, Sunday school teacher, and serving on a number of church committees. When it became an issue, Henry took a firm stand against those in the church who would not accept homosexuals into the community.

During his first few years in practice, Henry's devoted wife Mary filled all the duties of an office assistant, and when he eventually hired a nurse and office assistant, she continued to manage the office for a long time while raising their children.

He retired from medical practice in 1988 and after moving into Willow Valley, Henry became active in various activities, but most notably he engaged in bereavement groups, and established a group called "Compassion." To build acceptance of the differences that existed among this growing community of retirees, "Compassion" reached out to break down barriers, and to practice acceptance. He also participated in

discussion groups on philosophy and religion, and was strongly ecumenical in his views.

Henry and Mary also were devoted to their family, consisting of their son, Bill, their daughter, Louise, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Upon his retirement, the medical and dental staff of Lancaster General Hospital honored him with the first "Henry S. Wentz, M.D." award, which is now given each year to a member of the medical and dental staff for outstanding contributions to medical education at LGH, and service to the greater Lancaster Community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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REFERENCES

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