Mortimer J. Buckley, MD

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Dr Mortimer J. Buckley

Dr Mortimer J. Buckley, President of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery in 1995, died at the age of 75 years on November 24, 2007, at his home in Osterville, Massachusetts, after a valiant fight against multiple myeloma. The son of Irish immigrants, Dr Buckley was born and raised in Worcester, Massachusetts. He was a graduate of the College of the Holy Cross and Boston University School of Medicine, later honored by being named a Distinguished Alumnus of both schools.

Dr Buckley did all of his surgical training at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). In the middle of his general surgical training, he spent 2 years participating in a clinical and research fellowship in the Clinic of Heart Surgery at the National Institutes of Health, where he worked with Dr Andrew Glenn Morrow. Dr Buckley returned to the MGH to complete his surgical training, finishing in 1966. He immediately joined the faculty at the MGH and remained with that institution for the rest of his professional career until his retirement in 1998.

The timing of Dr Buckley's life, what he inherited from his parents, and the skills he developed placed him in the enviable position of having both the privilege and the capacity to be one of the pioneers who helped to guide the rapid growth of cardiac surgery as a specialty. Mort Buckley contributed to the development of the intra-aortic balloon pump and initiated its clinical application to assist acutely ischemic and failing hearts. Along with his colleagues Drs Eldred Mundth, Willard Daggett, and W. Gerald Austen, he developed surgical strategies to treat cardiogenic shock and the mechanical complications of acute myocardial infarction.

Although much of Dr Buckley's innovative efforts were focused on treating coronary artery disease and its complications, he was equally comfortable with managing even the most complex valvular, aortic, and congenital cardiac pathologies. Along with colleagues in cardiac anesthesia, he helped to establish the technique of deep hypothermia and hemodilution for the correction of congenital anomalies in infants. His bibliography of more than 200 published articles spans the entire gamut of adult and congenital heart disease.

Professionally, Mort Buckley combined innate intelligence, a prodigious memory, great technical facility, tenacity in the care of patients, an unbelievable work ethic, and absolute dedication to teaching, with a demand for excellence from his residents and complete commitment of the staff to the welfare of the patients. Dr Buckley considered his greatest career achievement to be the residents he taught to become skilled surgeons. One of the architects of an extraordinarily successful cardiac surgical residency program at MGH, Dr Buckley influenced and inspired innumerable surgeons' careers. More than 70 cardiac surgeons were graduates of his training program, many of whom went on to be professors and chiefs of their own training programs in cardiac surgery. Indeed, his entire American Association for Thoracic Surgery Presidential Address was devoted to a review of the history of residency training in thoracic surgery, ending with a proposal for changes in the format in effect at that time.

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Dr Buckley's influence extended across the globe. Not only did he mentor surgeons in operating rooms from China to Venezuela, but his international residents from Greece to Korea brought their surgical skills, honed under his tutelage, back to their own countries to improve cardiac care.

Dr Buckley served as Chief of the Cardiac Surgery Unit at MGH from 1970 to 1998, during which he enjoyed a distinguished career as Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School and President of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, and was a recipient of the American Heart Association's prestigious Paul Dudley White Award and the Abraham Colles Medal from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

As a leader, Mort Buckley had a vision of where he wanted cardiac surgery at the MGH to go and would go to any lengths to accomplish change if he thought it would

benefit the cardiac surgical program. In the process he earned the loyalty of colleagues, operating room staff, perfusionists, and cardiac intensive care and floor nurses, scores of whom remained on the MGH cardiac surgical service for decades to work alongside Dr Buckley and the rest of the team. A defined mission and a shared sense of purpose bred camaraderie.

Outside of the hospital, one could see a more personal Mort Buckley, who could be a charming raconteur. He had a well-honed Irish sense of humor and loved to tell stories. When not in the operating room, Mort Buckley enjoyed tennis and golf, but he was his happiest out at sea, sailing with his family. Dr Buckley is survived by his beloved wife of 45 years, Marilyn, his children, Dr Kathleen Buckley, Deirdre Clark, Kara Buckley, PhD, and Tim Buckley, and 10 grandchildren.