

Obituary

Edmund B. Spaeth, MD, 1890–1976

Edmund Benjamin Spaeth died on 18 August at the age of 86 in the Chestnut Hill Hospital, Philadelphia, after a short illness.

Mr Keith Lyle writes: Many of us will remember Ned (as he was known to his friends) as a frequent visitor to this country, usually in the summer when he often attended the Oxford Ophthalmological Congress. He and his wife Lea were delightful companions at any gathering and made friends with everyone they met. For several successive years at Oxford it was traditional for some of their old friends to join them on the first night of the congress for a private dinner party at the Randolph Hotel where their favourite meal was a mixed grill followed by strawberries and cream—sometimes they were hosts and sometimes some of us were. These evenings were always great fun but when Ned felt it was time for bed he would diplomatically get up from his chair and say, 'Well folks it has been grand to see you all again'. This was a signal for the party to break up.

He gave several papers at Oxford which were always interesting and well presented. He kept closely to his text and rarely exceeded the time allotted to him.

I think he was at his best when doing a difficult operation in his home surroundings at the Wills Eye Hospital. I well remember in the 1950s arriving on a Saturday afternoon at Philadelphia on my way to Washington, and calling at the hospital to see if Ned was around. To my joy he was just about to start removing an orbital tumour. He invited me to watch. It was a specially interesting case and he was having the operation filmed. Not only was his surgical expertise a pleasure to behold but he had the capacity to demand a high standard of efficiency from his two assistant surgeons and the entire theatre staff. His enthusiasm was quite infectious. There was never a dull moment during the operation which took 1 hour and 50 minutes.

Edmund Benjamin Spaeth was born in Webster New York on 22 April 1890. His father was a Lutheran Minister and had intended his son Edmund to follow in his footsteps, but the boy declined to do so and at the age of 14 went to work so as to pay for his board and lodging at home.

His medical studies were conducted at the University of Buffalo where he obtained his MD in 1916. He was an intern at the Arnot-Ogden Memorial Hospital Elmira, New York, in 1916–17, and then served in the US Army Medical Corps from 1917 to 1926 where he rose to the rank of major.

In 1927 he took up the practice of ophthalmology in Philadelphia, subsequently holding the post of Professor of Ophthalmology of the Graduate School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania 1934–55, and later Professor Emeritus. He was also Vice-Dean of Ophthalmology 1934–55 and Chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology 1943–55. He was consulting ophthalmologist at the US Naval Hospital and at the Graduate Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, and consulting surgeon at the Wills Eye Hospital, Philadelphia. He gained many medical awards including the Ophthalmic Medal of the University of Buffalo and also the Lucian Howe medal in 1927. In 1966 he received the Ophthalmology Alumni Award in honour of being the first Chief of Ophthalmology at the Walter Reed General Hospital, 1924–26.

He took great interest in plastic surgery and was a founder member of the American Board of Plastic Surgery in 1939. He was also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology, of the Philadelphia College of Physicians, and the Pennsylvania Neurological Society. He was author of *Ophthalmic Plastic Surgery* and of the *Principles and Practice of Ophthalmic Surgery*.

He is survived by his wife and four sons, one of whom, George, is an ophthalmologist; 11 grandchildren and two great grandchildren, and also a sister. Apart from ophthalmology he was devoted to music and a regular attender of the Bayreuth and other musical festivals.

Ned's life was characterized by enthusiasm, fearlessness, honesty, and a capacity for hard work. What he accomplished he did by his own efforts. As a father he was always fair if sometimes a little stern, but he was very proud of the achievements of his children. Ned and Lea were a truly devoted pair and their life was a splendid example to others.

Erratum

CHERRY, P. M. H., and GARNER, A. (1976) Corneal neovascularization treated with argon laser. *Brit. J. Ophthalmol.*, **60**, 467
108 mW should read 100 mW.