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Joseph Albin Witkowski, MD (1925–2015), A Dermatologist for All Seasons

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On September 2, 2015, Joseph Albin Witkowski passed away after a long illness. I had known Joe since residency days at the University of Pennsylvania, possibly even longer for I recall seeing him at a meeting of the American Medical Association in New York, when this was the biggest medical meeting in the world. His premature gray hair made a distinct impression.

Background

Joe was born in Northeast Philadelphia on April 26, 1925. He was second generation of Polish heritage. He had a younger sister and brother. As was the tradition among the Polish-American community, he attended a grammar school, where many of the classes were conducted in Polish. Upon graduating from Northeast High School in 1944, he was drafted into the Army Air Force and spent several months in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts. After his discharge, he matriculated at Pennsylvania State College, now Pennsylvania State University, and it was here that he met his future wife Grace Kepple, who had transferred from Slippery Rock State Teachers College. Joe then went onto Hahnemann Medical College, receiving his MD degree in 1953. He interned at Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, and he took his first year of dermatology residency there, completing his training at the University of Pennsylvania

Returning to Northeast Philadelphia, he started in private practice under Joseph Mulhern. Several months later, he opted for solo practice and opened his own office on the street level of his newly renovated home in Mayfair, where he would live for the next 55 years.

Joe was a superb clinician who treated each patient as a member of the family but more so with their disease or condition being an academic exercise that required more inspection. His therapy was also innovative, pioneering the use of intralesional steroids in the acne abscess but also traditional; for many years, he continued to use superficial radiation until malpractice insurance made it prohibitive.

In 1995, he retired with the idea of travelling more and devoting more time to his garden, where every blade of grass was well manicured and the roses were pruned to perfection. He would also find time to indulge in his hobby of HO gauge railroading, using a former treatment room for the elaborate setup.

Academic Achievements

I came to have a half century collaboration with Joe when I started my residency at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Joe was conducting the acne clinic, the first such specialty clinic devoted to the disease, and it was sponsored by the Huntington Hartford Foundation. Various acne regimens were tried and from that even came the concept that, in particular, chocolate did not affect acne.

His first academic appointment was at his alma mater, under Harry J. Hurley. Within a few years, he returned to the University of Pennsylvania, Department of Dermatology, where he rose through the ranks to Clinical Professor and then Emeritus Professor. For many years, he was Chairman of the Morris Samitz Lectureship Committee. His association with Samitz stemmed from his succeeding him at the Pennsylvania College of Podiatry, now Temple University School of Podiatric Medicine, as Professor of Dermatology. His course at the school was so vigorous that graduates of the school could hold their own with any medical clinician in the city. His work there led to his co-authoring a textbook on diseases of the skin and an issue of Clinics in Dermatology devoted to the foot.

In organized medicine, he was one of the founding members of the Pennsylvania Academy of Dermatology in 1969 and then in 1980 served as President of the PAD. During his tenure, the annual lecture became known as the Louis A. Duhring Lectureship, and he instituted the president's jollification party for the annual dinner.

In 1983, we joined together in initiating the Section on Dermatology of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia in order to bring dermatologists together in a collegial atmosphere. He served as the first Clerk and then Chairman from 1986-1989.

Joe was a regular attendee, not only at the Philadelphia Dermatological Society, but also at the American Academy of Dermatology, never missing an annual meeting while he was in active practice. He also participated in the Advisory Board of the AAD.

Other Contributions

Joe and I would write initially on Tuesday evenings and later on Wednesday evenings. From the collaboration, we published over 160 papers, ranging from

_____ to _____. Sometimes, the work would lead to a poster exhibit at the AAD.

His writing skill was utilized in his capacity as Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Dermatology*, Deputy Editor of *Clinics in Dermatology* and Deputy Editor of *SKINMed*. His additional accomplishments included textbooks on the decubitus ulcer and cutaneous infections.

Legacy

Joe left behind his wife Grace, his wife of 64 years, his son Tom, who is on the faculty of Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University in Anesthesiology, and his daughter, Beth, a research technician at Cephalon, now Teva, and two grandchildren.

Note: In reviewing the sheepskins on the wall, it appears that dad was an intern at Kings 53-54 and did one year of residency from 54-55 also at King's. He was a resident at HUP from 55-57 and I don't see anything from Hahnemann as a rewsident.