

## ORGANIZATION NEWS

### In Memoriam: Henry B. Betts, MD, Friend and Mentor

Our dear friend and mentor, Henry B. Betts, MD, died on Sunday, January 4, 2015, at the age of 86. He meant a great deal to medical rehabilitation, those who interacted with him, people with disabilities, and the community at large. He was as warm, caring, and personable as he was visionary, dynamic, and inspirational. So much of what we do today as rehabilitation professionals and caring individuals, and so much of the approach to our work, derives directly from what we have learned from Dr. Betts' ideas and teaching.

Dr. Betts was born in New Rochelle, New York, and was raised in Flemington, New Jersey. He frequently told us that he attended a 1-room school house taught by a teacher who had a disability and that he had a close family member with a disability. He later moved with his family to Coconut Grove, Florida. He spoke often of his abhorrence of the discrimination that he witnessed during those years. Dr. Betts earned his bachelor's degree from Princeton and his medical degree from the University of Virginia Medical School, and he remained very proud of his affiliation with those institutions throughout his life. His medical internship in Cincinnati was followed by 2 years of service in the Marine Corps, which also shaped his thinking and actions. Dr. Betts completed his Residency in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at New York University Medical Center under the mentorship of Dr. Howard Rusk. This was followed by a 2-year fellowship in leadership at New York University. When Joseph Kennedy had a stroke, Dr. Betts was called on to provide direct full-time care to him, spending considerable time interacting with the Kennedy family.

In 1963, Dr. Betts moved to Chicago, Illinois, where 2 years later he became Medical Director at the relatively new Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC), founded by Dr. Paul B. Magnuson, a Chicago orthopedic surgeon and former Medical Director of the entire U.S. Veterans Administration System. At that time, RIC was in an old converted warehouse. Dr. Betts provided direct care to patients with a variety of disabling conditions and worked extensively with the community to grow RIC's programs in size, stature, and impact. He developed a reputation not only for providing care for the medical problems of people with disabilities, but also for dealing with their psychological issues and, at times, complicated social situations. Accordingly, he created a holistic environment for care, and he built the rehabilitation team around addressing the totality of the patient experience, including multiple therapy disciplines, social workers, psychologists, therapeutic recreation specialists, vocational counselors, and other physicians. The importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, the team approach to care, and the need for the involvement of the patient and family were hallmarks of the care provided by

rehabilitation professionals. Dr. Betts had the foresight to note that "most of what goes on in rehabilitation goes on after they're here, being integrated into society, taking up athletics, art, writing, painting..." He made a point of addressing issues such as accessible housing, employment, sexuality, recreational activities, ethics, and many others. In the early 1970s, after extensive planning and work with community leaders, Dr. Betts initiated the construction of the building that currently houses the RIC flagship hospital and its major programs. He remained in the role of Medical Director until 1994. He also served as Chief Executive Officer of RIC from 1986 through 1997. During his time as a leader and practitioner, he repeatedly told his staff, colleagues, trainees, and anyone who would listen: "Listen to your patients." To his credit, he applied this principle not only to his work as a physician, but to the decisions he made as a builder and leader of an institution.

Dr. Betts understood the role of education in ensuring the future of high quality of care of people with disabilities. In keeping with this theme, and in support of the value he placed on teaching activities, he started the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Residency Program at Northwestern University and RIC. Later, he added extensive medical student training experiences and a large continuing education center for allied health, nursing, and other rehabilitation professionals.

Dr. Betts consistently understood and espoused the importance of the role of science and research in the development of the specialty of medical rehabilitation and the care of people with disabilities. As a result, he established and later expanded the research program at RIC. He was also responsible for establishing and maintaining the affiliation of RIC with Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, serving as the Chairman of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation until 1994 and as its Paul B. Magnuson Professor until 1998.

Dr. Betts served as President of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine in 1975 and 1976, during years of great expansion in the activities and impact of the organization. He also was a founding member of the Association of Academic Physiatrists and was its second President in 1968 and 1969. He remained committed to these and other organizations throughout his career.

Recognizing that the empowerment of people with disabilities was a civil rights issue that impacted the quality of life for people with disabilities, advocacy for and with people with disabilities was a central focus of his career. Dr. Betts was a strong supporter of the independent living movement. He helped to establish Access Living, the independent living center in Chicago. Locally, he worked with then-Mayor Richard J. Daley to place curb cuts in

the sidewalks to improve accessibility. He was instrumental in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Dr. Betts' commitment to improving employment and enabling the empowerment of people with disabilities continued late into his life. Interestingly, he also was a vocal advocate on behalf of the presence of medical rehabilitation at the National Institutes of Health, working closely with Mary Lasker in this and other efforts.

At RIC and elsewhere, Dr. Betts created an environment in which diversity, equality, and shared commitment are valued. He instilled in all who trained under him and who worked along with him the importance of collaboration—with other professionals and with people with disabilities. Through his demeanor and his words, he constantly reminded us of the importance of effective communication. He helped each of us who work in rehabilitation to discover our own humanity and to apply it to the work that we do. He infused that sense of humanity into RIC and into all who interacted with him.

Dr. Betts did all of this as a physician, educator, leader, and caring citizen. He was a dynamic speaker and great storyteller. However, he also was a colleague, close friend, and member of our family. He was a kind and generous man, with whom colleagues, friends, and patients loved spending time. He readily shared with others his thoughts, his humor, and mostly, his support and compassion. He knew how to have fun, how to simultaneously engage individuals, and how to “work a crowd.” People who interacted with him often made the observation that he made them

feel like they were the only ones who mattered. He led through inspiration and through his actions.

Dr. Betts was known as “someone who just wouldn't take no for an answer,” relentless without being antagonistic. Most important, he was passionate about the need to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. We are enormously grateful for the opportunity to have benefitted from his inspiration and commitment.

Dr. Betts is survived by his loving wife, Monika, his sister, Marguerite Betts King, his daughter, Amanda, and son-in-law, Trevor, and his granddaughter, Lucia. A beautiful memorial service was held on January 16, 2015, attended by his family, friends, and numerous admirers.

Although he will be sorely missed by all of us who knew him, interacted with him, and were influenced by him, we are all comforted in the knowledge that our own commitment to the values he cherished and the daily work that we do will enable us to carry on his legacy.

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