

John Francis O'Connor, MD, 1931–2012

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Jack and Anne O'Connor

John O'Connor (everyone called him Jack) was born in Boston on February 2, 1931. At age 4, he contracted poliomyelitis, then known as infantile paralysis; it left him with permanent, near-total paralysis of his left arm and shoulder. He grew up in Dedham, in the Boston suburbs; he spent almost the whole of his life in and around Boston and Cape Cod. In 1959, he married Anne Walsh. Their exceptionally happy marriage led to two daughters and four surviving sons, including one pediatric radiologist and one pediatrician. His medical career was largely spent at the Boston City Hospital and Boston University School of Medicine, where for 21 years he was associate dean for admissions; at one

time, he was responsible for the admission of more than half the living graduates of that medical school. Late in life, he developed chronic congestive heart failure and an uncharacterized neurological illness. He died peacefully at his home on Cape Cod, surrounded by friends and relatives, on March 1, 2012.

Jack graduated from Boston College and the Boston University School of Medicine. His internship was at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. He then returned to Boston and had 2 years of residency in pediatrics at Boston City Hospital. Next was residency in radiology at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (now part of the Brigham and Women's Hospital) under the legendary Dr. Merrill Sosman. The residency included 6 months at Boston Children's Hospital, where Jack came under the spell of Dr. E. B. D. Neuhauser, founding president of the Society for Pediatric Radiology.

Jack was then appointed director of pediatric radiology for both the Boston City Hospital (now known as the Boston Medical Center) and the Boston University Medical Center, positions he held for more than 30 years. He also became director of radiology for the North Shore Children's Hospital in Salem, MA, and served as chief of radiology at the Franciscan Children's Hospital in Boston. By 1972, he was professor of radiology, pediatrics and anatomy at the Boston University School of Medicine. The professorship of anatomy reflected Jack's presentations, year after year, to medical students of gross anatomy as shown by radiographs.

Jack's medical interests and contributions ranged widely. Early on, he saw and exploited the diagnostic usefulness of percutaneous angiography. A large number of his papers dealt with skeletal injuries, nonaccidental, incurred during sports and otherwise. His interests extended far beyond pediatric radiology itself; voice recognition, teleradiology, informatics, and picture archive and communication systems all got his attention, insight and analysis. He facilitated effective liaison among the various branches of radiology. He helped analyze radiologic workforce problems and career opportunities in pediatric radiology. His recognition of

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the basic principle of contrast enhancement, now of enormous importance in CT and MRI, led to his 1963 paper on total body opacification, seminal enough to be on a list of the most cited radiologic papers. These contributions earned him his fellowship in the American College of Radiology. He served as president of both the Society for Pediatric Radiology and the New England Roentgen Ray Society, the regional organization serving the educational needs of the practicing radiologists and radiologists-in-training of New England. He was recognized with the Gold Medal of the Society for Pediatric Radiology, and at his wake, this medal—his most treasured award—lay on the casket.

Meanwhile, his extracurricular activities were also numerous. He coached Little League baseball and youth hockey. He showed his sons and daughters saltwater sailing, despite the

fact that he had only one useful arm. He was an avid bird-watcher and served on the board of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. He was an exceptionally skilled photographer, especially of birds, even capturing them in their nests high in the tree canopy. He and Anne cared for many foster children in addition to their biological children. He was an active, involved grandparent to his 15 grandchildren. His extended family is very large, and he managed to be close to each of its members.

But it is as a person that Jack really shone. He was kind, self-effacing, hard-working, convivial, knowledgeable, supremely skilled in pediatric radiology and always faithful to his duties to his young patients. He directed an active, busy, productive, happy department of pediatric radiology, central to Boston Medical Center's care of its ill children. He was a pleasure to work with. He is greatly missed.