

In Memoriam: Alfred Jaretzki III, MD

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Alfred Jaretzki III, Professor Emeritus of Clinical Surgery at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City died at age 94 on May 29, 2014. He was also a valuable member of Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America's Medical/Scientific Advisory Board. Fred, as he was known to family, friends, and colleagues, was born in Greenwich, Connecticut on August 11, 1919. He had a distinguished career as a cardiothoracic surgeon in the Department of Surgery at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University, a career that spanned nearly a half-century before his retirement from the operating room in 1992. But Fred remained highly engaged in academic surgery and medicine after his retirement, continuing close collaborations with neurologists sharing his interest in myasthenia gravis until the time of his death.

While at Harvard College, Fred served as captain of the junior varsity football team and treasurer of the Lampoon troupe. After graduating in 1941, he enrolled in Harvard Medical School, later moving to New York City where he spent nearly his entire academic career. He trained in surgery at Presbyterian and Lenox Hill hospitals between 1944 and 1955, a period that was interrupted by his military service. In 1954, he was hired as an Instructor at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, beginning a 48-year tenure in their operating rooms as a member of the surgical faculty. Early in his cardiothoracic surgery career he was part of the team that developed synthetic vascular grafts. But in neurology circles, Fred was known for the crucial role he played in the definition of the anatomy of the thymus and in its complete or near-complete excision from the anterior mediastinum as therapy in myasthenia gravis. He pioneered the maximal thymectomy that included both transsternal and transcervical incisions to fully remove thymic tissue from retrothyroid, cervical, and inferior mediastinal regions. In work performed with neurology colleagues from Columbia in the 1990s, he demonstrated that crude remission rates with the maximal thymectomy approach exceeded those from less invasive techniques. Fred had the reputation of being meticulous in the operating room, attending personally to every detail of the surgery. He publically challenged surgical colleagues at other institutions to demonstrate that less-extensive thymectomy approaches with less complete thymus removal were equally effective in managing myasthenia; in the end his views that a complete resection was needed prevailed. Fred also led the charge to standardize clinical classifications and outcome assessments in myasthenia gravis, culminating in the seminal recommendations for clinical research standards published in 2000 (*Neurology* 2000;55:16-23) sponsored by MGFA. Fred, and

not a neurologist, was the first author on the manuscript. At the time of his death, Fred was serving as the Surgical Chair for MGTX, the NIH/NINDS-supported multinational Thymectomy Trial in Non-thymomatous Myasthenia Gravis. Fred and our late colleague, John Newsom-Davis, were the chief proponents over the years of conducting a controlled therapeutic trial for non-thymomatous myasthenia gravis. Although a strong proponent throughout his life for maximal excision of thymus tissue to manage MG, Fred was also practical and pragmatic. He acquiesced to the more commonly employed extended transsternal thymectomy approach for the trial, which has now completed enrollment and is awaiting finalization of follow-up phases.

Fred was a dear friend to many of us in the myasthenia gravis community. He was a man of distinction and authority, firm in his opinions, as fastidious in appearance as he was in the operating suite, but gracious in his relationships with colleagues. He enjoyed the outdoors and was an avid skier. Professionally he served as President of the New York Thoracic Society, Medical Director of the Columbia operating rooms, and co-authored a book describing the history of surgery at Columbia. He was a member of numerous surgical societies, including the American College of Surgeons, American Association for Thoracic Surgery, the Society for Thoracic Surgery, and the John Jones Surgical Society.

Fred is survived by his children Alfred IV, Lasell Bartlett, Alexander and Sumner, his stepson Adam Isles and his wife Alexandra. A memorial service was held for Fred on June 18 at the Knickerbocker Club in New York City. Contributions in his memory can be made to the Alfred Jaretzki III MD Endowment Fund which supports research efforts of junior cardiothoracic faculty at Columbia University Medical Center. Donations should be sent to the following address: Department of Surgery Finance Office, Attn: Trisha J. Hargaden, 21 Audubon Avenue, Room 209, New York, NY 10032.