

OBITUARY

Edgar B. Johnwick

1907—1965

Recently a room has been added to the U. S. Public Health Service Hospital at Carville, Louisiana. It is a comfortable and attractive reading room adjacent to the Medical Library, available to staff and professional visitors to the hospital. A simple bronze plaque on the door reads: Edgar B. Johnwick Memorial Reading Room. It is an appropriate memorial to a man where he did his best work and where many of his ideas have become reality.

Dr. Edgar B. Johnwick was Medical Officer in Charge of the Public Health Service Hospital at Carville, the National Leprosarium of the Continental United States, from November 1956 until his death on 14 October 1965. During this time a tremendous metamorphosis occurred at this institution, physically and spiritually. Under his leadership, the hospital developed

into a very active center of training and research in the field of leprosy on a national and international level. He reorganized the administrative structure of the hospital, recruited staff with special abilities, and fostered close cooperation between the various departments for the good of all. He introduced the concept of rehabilitation in the treatment of leprosy, and restored to the patient a feeling of self-respect and hope.

One of his far-reaching accomplishments was the institution of an annual training course in cooperation with American Leprosy Missions, Inc. Another was for dermatologists in military service. Each was geared to the particular needs of the group invited. These have met with notable success. Dermatology residents from a number of medical schools were encouraged to

visit the hospital. Prominent persons in various disciplines from over the world were invited to visit Carville for exchange of ideas. In less than one decade he brought the hospital at Carville to a position of prominence in the field of leprosy and made its programs known throughout the world. He welcomed visits and fostered international exchange of ideas.

Dr. Johnwick was born in Estonia, the son of a sea captain who fled with his family from Communistic domination in a dramatic voyage that brought them to the United States. They settled in Gainesville, Florida. He completed his secondary education in Florida and graduated from the University of Florida with a B.S. degree in 1930. He received an M.D. from Harvard University Medical School and a M.P.H. from the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. He received his dermatology training at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and was certified by the American Board of Dermatology in 1949. Dermatology became his chosen field and remained his professional love to the end.

Our original professional association, which began when Dr. Johnwick first came to Carville, continued and our personal relationship grew into a close friendship which gave me an unusual opportunity to know well a most unusual man. We worked together on a number of projects, papers, and exhibits. He was an artist never satisfied with less than perfection in his own endeavors. The drawings that he made of the microscopic structure of skin lesions were truly works of art.

Dr. Johnwick was equally as precise in word and thought. His writings, both personal and professional, were expertly executed. His command of the English language was spectacular, although he learned English only at the age of 13. When appropriate, humor crept into his writings, and such personal glimpses enriched the lives of those who knew him well. He was an avid reader with a deep appreciation of the classics, but he was also well informed on modern literature.

When, in 1959, I approached the U. S. Public Health Service on the possibility of

opening an outpatient clinic for leprosy patients at the U. S. Public Health Service Hospital in San Francisco, California, my ideas fell on receptive soil. Dr. Johnwick had long visualized the necessity of such a program, and the Clinic was opened in 1960.

In 1948, Dr. Johnwick married the former Hazel Barkley, a native of Kentucky and a public health nurse. They have two children, Lisa and Charles. Hazel made their home a center of gracious hospitality for guests from throughout the world, and although she chose the background, Hazel was an essential part of his life. He was a devoted son to his widowed mother who made her home with them.

Dr. Johnwick had suffered from angina pectoris for several years, and although his physical activities were at times restricted, his mind was continually working. On the morning of 14 October 1965 he died suddenly while preparing to come to his office. After a simple but impressive memorial at the hospital his body was laid at rest in Gainesville, Florida.

A telegram of condolence from the Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service to the family expressed the thoughts of so many who will miss him. ". . . our most heartfelt sympathy in the passing of Dr. Johnwick. The skill, imagination and experience, and most of all the warmth of human sympathy which he brought to his task will be greatly missed by all those who knew and worked with him. I hope you . . . will take comfort in his contributions to the health and well-being of his fellow human beings throughout the world. They represent a fine and enduring monument."

The initial shock from the sudden death of Edgar Johnwick has lessened and the pain will diminish with time, but there remains a void that cannot be filled. As an individual this unique, gifted man cannot be replaced. I do not know who has suffered a greater loss—those of us who knew Edgar Johnwick or those of you who did not have the good fortune to meet him and be inspired by his dynamic personality.

— Paul Fasal