In Memoriam

John G. Batsakis, MD (1929–2013)

A Historical Perspective on His Contributions to Pathology

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On January 20, 2013, John G. Batsakis, MD, passed away peacefully at his home in Houston, Texas. We pay tribute to such a giant of a man for his significant and lasting contributions to the pathology field in general and to the head and neck subspecialty in particular. John was raised in upper Michigan where he received his early education. He graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor in 1954. He then completed a rotating internship at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, DC, and this was followed by a residency in pathology at the University of Michigan. Upon completing his pathology training, he joined the faculty of the same institution and remained there until 1979. During that time, his main area of academic interest was clinical chemistry, to which his scholarly contribution has advanced the practice of that field. From 1979 to 1982, he was the chairman of the Department of Pathology at the University of Vermont in Burlington and he moved to Texas to chair the Pathology Department at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, where he remained until his formal retirement in 1996.

Throughout his distinguished academic career, he made seminal and lasting contributions on wide and varied topics in the pathology field. He authored the first book in head and neck pathology, 24 chapters, more than 500 peer-reviewed articles, and countless reviews and commentaries. At MD Anderson he transformed the Anatomic Pathology Department from a purely service-oriented practice to a world-class diagnostic and academic center. John was an unerringly trusted and compassionate leader who gave unselfishly to his trainees, faculty, and staff. He spent considerable time and effort on the recruitment of talented junior faculty with knowledge of molecular pathology and provided them with the resources to introduce and integrate these new advances into daily practice. His foresight, intuition, and sense of timing foretold the impending role of molecular and technologic advances on the practice of pathology. One of John’s enduring legacies was his tireless advocacy for the integral role of the pathologist in the multidisciplinary management of patients with cancer. John’s intellectual and visionary input in the field of salivary gland histogenesis and tumorigenesis has clearly been valued, and his scholarly publications have advanced the diagnosis and management of these tumors.

John’s wisdom, equanimity, and humility have left lasting imprints on many people and especially for the ones who had the privilege to work and learn from such a gentleman and scholar. For Mary, his wife of 55 years; his 3 adult children, Laura, George, and Sharon; and 4 grandchildren, Richard (Trey), Alexandra, Georgie (Gigi), and Mary (Maggie); and for those of us who worked closely with him, he will forever be missed.

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