A. Edward Maumenee, MD, 1913-1998

For half a century, the forceful personality and creative intellect of Professor A. Edward Maumenee, MD, dominated American and international ophthalmology. He was a star—indeed a supernova—that illuminated ophthalmic practice, research, and teaching the world over. Now, with his peaceful death on January 18, 1998, at age 84 years, that star has become dim. Fortunately, it will never be completely extinguished because his legacies will continue to exert profound influence. Ophthalmologists, scientists, and patients will continue to benefit from his writings and teachings.

Idolized throughout the world, “the Prof” was no less a hero in his own institution, where his students and colleagues loved, admired, and respected him. He served as director of the Wilmer Ophthalmological Institute, Baltimore, Md, from 1955 to 1979. In testimony to his accomplishments, an 8-story building and an endowed professorship are named for him at his beloved Wilmer Institute,1,2 where so much of his productivity originated and where a memorial fund has been created in his name.

His interests were so diverse and his influence so pervasive that a Festschrift issue of the American Journal of Ophthalmology in 19793 required 8 specialists in various spheres of endeavor to adequately describe his accomplishments. These achievements include the following: initial description of the immunological nature of corneal graft rejection; discovery of new diseases, such as congenital corneal dystrophies; and enhanced methods of surgery for cataract, corneal transplantation, glaucoma filtration, strabismus, congenital glaucoma, congenital cataract, postoperative hypotonia, epithelial invasion of the anterior chamber, and numerous others. Moreover, he was the first to describe and popularize the use of fluorescein angiography and clearly delineated the major types of macular degeneration well before anyone else considered this an important group of diseases. The number of his articles on these and other subjects exceeds 350, and they clearly have stood the test of time.

In addition to influencing both choice and technique of surgical intervention through his writings, Dr Maumenee regularly welcomed visitors to the Wilmer Institute to watch him operate and to learn at his side. He was a surgical virtuoso, with dazzling technical skills and a calm, confident, and controlled operating room personality. He inspired countless colleagues, residents, and fellows through his personal example.

Long before “continuous quality improvement” became the byword of management gurus, Ed Maumenee constantly strived to make things better for his institution, for his residents, for ophthalmic organizations worldwide, and, of course, for his patients. Patients were referred to him from all corners of the world, and he invariably gave hope and confidence to even the most desperately sick individuals. Usually, they left Baltimore with much improved vision and much improved outlooks for the future.

Ed was simultaneously graceful, charming, kind, generous, incisive, witty, and indefatigable. He could be tough when he had to be. He was an accomplished, vigorous, and competitive athlete. His enthusiasm was exhilarating, and it was fun to be in his company. He set exceptionally high standards for himself, and his residents considered it essential to try to match them. Few did, but everyone’s performance as an ophthalmologist was improved as a result of the attempt. He loved Socratic dialogue, and he challenged his residents to debate with him to try to prove him wrong. Few ever could; however, when they did, he was delighted. He transmitted knowledge about the scientific and the clinical aspects of ophthalmology by using both didactic and case presentation formats. He was masterful with both techniques. He was at his best when demonstrating live surgical technique or unusual physical findings on his patients. All of us knew he was uniquely skilled and gifted. He was a splendid example of an excellent mentor and had the ability to bring out the best in his residents, becoming a father figure to many of us. We relished the opportunity to bask in his reflected glow.

Dr Maumenee maintained a leadership role in numerous ophthalmic organizations. He was the first president of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology.

He received numerous awards honoring his outstanding contributions to ophthalmology. He received the Howe Medal of the American Ophthalmological Society (1969), a gold medal that recognizes distinguished professional service and one of the most prestigious awards in medicine. He also received the Francis I. Proctor Research Medal (1972) for outstanding research in basic science as applied to ophthalmology, presented by the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology. In 1986, he received the International Duke-Elder Medal, an award bestowed by the International Council of Ophthalmology every 4 years to an ophthalmologist who, by his or her distinction, leadership and teaching, has contributed most to the development of international relations and friendships between ophthalmologists. He was also the recipient of the Gonin Medal and the Pisart Vision Award. He received honorary fellowships or degrees from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland; the University of Illinois; the University of Alabama; and the Technischen Universität Munchen, Munchen, Germany. Numerous other honors and distinctions are listed in the Oral Ophthalmology History Series published by the American Academy of Ophthalmology.¹ In addition to all these professional awards and honors, Ed was particularly proud of his recent induction into the Alabama Hall of Fame.

His efforts in the development of new knowledge and improved quality of care led to the creation or improvement of numerous organizations, including the Eye Bank Association of America, Tissue Banks International, and the Association for Research and Vision in Ophthalmology. In a cooperative effort with Senator Lister Hill and Jules Stein of Research to Prevent Blindness Inc, Dr Maumenee was instrumental in the founding of the National Eye Institute at the National Institutes of Health. The world has benefited greatly from his efforts to improve the quality of teaching, research, and clinical care in ophthalmology.

When Ed Maumenee died peacefully in his sleep, within hours of enjoying his last game of golf, the world lost one of the most influential, productive, and creative ophthalmologists of the 20th century. During the memorial service in his honor near Mobile, Ala, his childhood home, simultaneous eulogies occurred in more than 35 countries. His family, friends, colleagues, students, and patients deeply mourn his loss.

All know that he had no equal as a mentor, friend, healer, and teacher, and all grieve that this uniquely inspirational giant of a man is no longer physically with us. He will continue to live in our hearts.

Morton F. Goldberg, MD
Walter J. Stark, MD
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REFERENCES


Announcement

The 57th Annual Wilmer Resident’s Association Meeting, May 1-2, 1998, is dedicated to Dr Maumenee. A memorial service will take place on May 1, 1998. For further information contact Morton F. Goldberg, MD, Wilmer Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21287.