
Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison On the Death of Professor Emeritus George L. Bush

George L. Bush, MD, retired Associate Professor (CHS) of Anesthesiology, passed away July 11, 2016 in Sister Bay, Wisconsin. Dr. Bush joined the UW faculty on August 19, 1974, as Assistant Professor. He was part of a group of young and dynamic faculty that set a standard of excellence in education and patient care for the department. Their legacy continues today. George's special expertise was in cardiac anesthesia and he was director of that section of the department from 1976 to 1981. He was a teacher at heart and enjoyed guiding medical students through their first anesthetic experience and training residents to solve the most complicated challenges in the operating room. His approach to teaching and clinical care embodied compassion and safety. His excellence in teaching was recognized when he received the inaugural Anesthesia Resident Teaching Award in 1982.

George Bush was born August 11, 1942 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He graduated Magna Cum Laude from Capitol University in Columbus, Ohio in 1964. He attended the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine graduating in 1968 and was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha. After an internship at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan, George completed an anesthesiology residency at the University of Pennsylvania in 1971 followed by a one-year research fellowship. He was board certified as a Diplomate of the American Board of Anesthesiology. Military service at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas followed. There he was promoted to Major and was Chief of Anesthesia and the Operative Section at Munson Army Hospital prior to his honorable discharge in 1974.

George was a private pilot and was instrument, commercial and aerobatic rated. As a teenager he considered aviation as a career, but realized his eyesight would limit his options. Nonetheless, he loved all things aviation related and was actively involved in the Experimental Aircraft Association and supported the American Air Museum in Britain and the Tuskegee Airmen National Museum. Lessons learned in aviation found their way to the operating room. George was one of the first advocates for checklists and a crisis resource management approach to care. Both are now routinely used during the perioperative period. Patient safety was paramount in his mind with pre-anesthetic equipment checks, understanding the patient's medical condition and insuring availability of medications, oxygen and rescue equipment. Residents were encouraged to consider what could go wrong and to plan for that eventuality. George believed and taught that the patient was the most important person in the room and for that person there were no minor procedures.

George was director of the Anesthesia Clerkship required of all third year medical students beginning in 1974 until his retirement. Anesthesia became the most highly rated rotation in the clinical curriculum and contributed to a higher percentage of Wisconsin medical students choosing to specialize in anesthesiology than the national average. In 1981, George was appointed the Director of Outpatient Anesthesia and in inaugurating that position at University Hospitals developed procedures and guidelines focused on efficiency and utilization without compromising standards of care. He was elected President of the Madison Society of Anesthesiologists in 1977 and, after rising through the ranks of the Wisconsin Society of Anesthesiologists, served as president of that organization beginning in 1981. He represented Wisconsin anesthesiologists nationally as an Alternate Delegate to the American Society of Anesthesiologists in 1983. On July 1, 1984, George was promoted to Associate Professor (CHS).

George possessed a wicked sense of humor, alternately blessing or vexing his colleagues and co-workers. He liked to throw grand parties. He always brought his version of Bush Beans to the Department potluck luncheons. His colleagues in the department recall him as a member of the Raggedy Ass Rounders, an informal group made up of like-minded faculty. George appreciated Formula One racing and had a glass-topped table in his office the base of which was a racing slick. He and his wife, Judy, were on the committee that formed the Madison-Freiburg Sister City relationship. He was a man of faith and lived that out through his generosity, many friendships and volunteer service to others.

Early in his academic career, George survived thyroid cancer, probably caused by radiation to his thymus as a child, and later developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Although having to undergo surgeries and aggressive therapies, he managed to shoulder through these illnesses while maintaining his equanimity and grace. At the end of his career George became dysarthric with an unstable gait that sadly forced him into a premature retirement in 1998. He was diagnosed with an inherited degenerative cerebellar disease that ultimately required him to use a motorized wheelchair and deprived him of activities that he loved most: flying, driving, teaching and being an anesthesiologist. Despite his myriad of health challenges, George remained intellectually active and a loving, caring man until his death.

His wife of 39 years, Judy Anderson Bush, five children, eleven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren survive him. His ashes were laid to rest at Luther Memorial Church in Madison.