

In Memoriam: Michael E. DeBakey, MD ... Multidiscipline Brilliance

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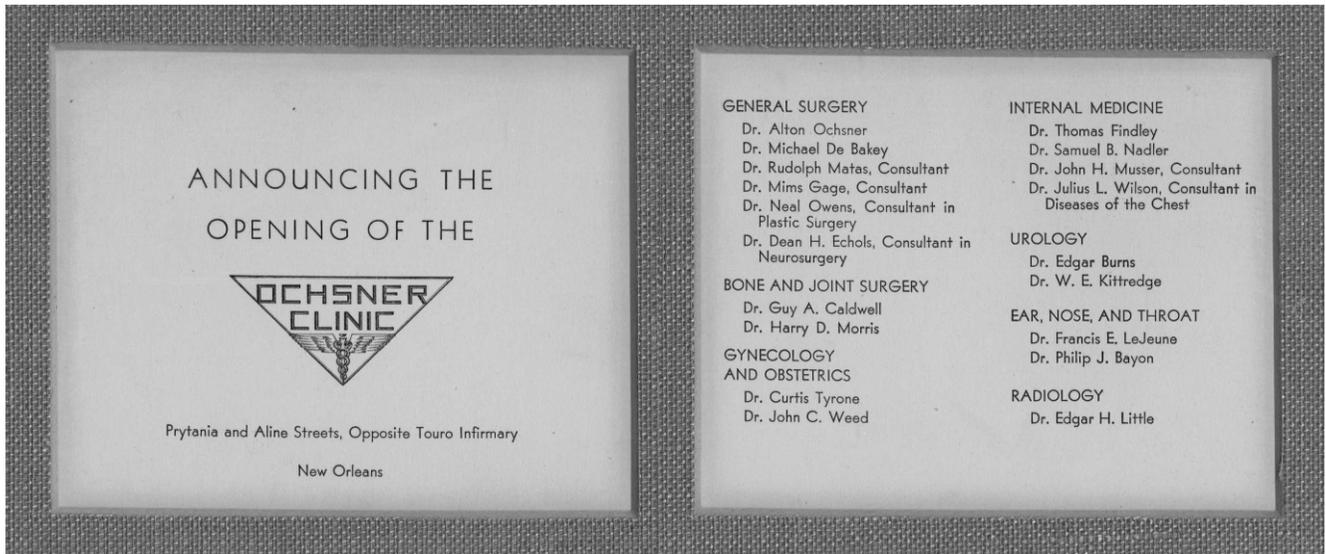


Figure 1. Announcement of the opening of the Ochsner Clinic.

Dr. Michael DeBakey is probably the only physician in history whose name is a household word. Most of his fame derives from his surgical prowess in the development of cardiovascular surgery. However great that accomplishment, many others are noteworthy as well. Through his vision and boundless vitality, he built the Baylor College of Medicine from an undeveloped medical school to an internationally renowned biomedical institute. His untiring efforts were a stimulus to energize the development of the entire Texas Medical Center. Through his leadership, the National Library of Medicine became a reality. While serving in the Surgeon General's Office during World War II, he was influential in establishing the Mobile Auxiliary Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit. He also helped in developing the Veterans Administration hospital system.

Dr. DeBakey had unlimited energy, which he diverted toward scholarly pursuit. He published approximately 1,600 articles and books. Expectedly, the majority of his publications were directed at experimental and clinical surgery. However, they included many other subjects, such as papers directed toward governmental regulation of health care, position papers for medical and nonmedical organizations, thoughts for the improvement of mankind, and even poetry.

His accomplishments are beyond comprehension. His surgical schedule lists more than 60 000 operations. He was an inventor of many surgical instruments and the innovator of numerous cardiovascular surgical procedures. His honors are magnificent and of abundance. Just to name a few, he received more than 50 honorary degrees from national and international universities. He was the recipient of the Lasker Clinical Research Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Presidential National Medal of Science, the Dag Hammarskjöld Prize, and the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, the highest and most renowned award given by the US Congress.

Dr. DeBakey had a pronounced influence in the development of the Ochsner Clinic (Figure 1). He and my father were the first full-time members of the Department of Surgery, which grew rapidly as a renowned national and international surgical group. While in the military service, through his influence with the War Assets Administration, he was helpful in obtaining Camp Plauche for the development of the original Ochsner Foundation Hospital. As a student and colleague of my father for 16 years, he had great admiration for my father and they formed a very strong bond. The middle name of Dr. DeBakey's first three children is Ochsner, and Dad was the godfather of his fourth child. Throughout his life, he dutifully referred to my father as Dr. Ochsner, as I have always referred to him as Dr. DeBakey.

The world has lost a giant of a man whose contributions to medicine will probably never be surpassed. He is survived by his wife, Katrin, daughter Olga, sons Michael and Dennis, and sisters Selma and Lois. He will be missed by thousands of physicians he trained and will be remembered by thousands more for his friendship and leadership.

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