

Ochsner Profiles

Curtis Tyrone, MD

Hector O. Ventura, MD

*Director, Cardiology Residency Program, Department of Cardiology,
Ochsner Clinic Foundation, New Orleans, LA*

Eddy Randrup, MD

Department of Urology, Ochsner Clinic Foundation, Slidell, LA



Curtis Tyrone, MD

In early 1940, Dr. Edgar Burns, a urologist, approached fellow Tulane University faculty member Dr. Curtis H. Tyrone, a gynecologist and obstetrician. Informing Tyrone that Drs. Caldwell, Ochsner, and LeJeune had asked Burns to join them in forming a group practice clinic, Burns said, "I told them I would consider it, but there is one condition. I won't come unless you also invite Curtis Tyrone" (1,p58). This was the first Tyrone had heard of the Ochsner group, but he was interested. The other founders were agreeable to Dr. Burns's request, and Curtis H. Tyrone became the youngest of the five founders of the Ochsner Clinic.

Throughout 1940 and 1941 the five surgeons made plans for the clinic facilities and arranged financing. Rudolph Hecht of the Hibernia National Bank arranged a loan for the acquisition of a building at Aline and Prytania streets in Uptown New Orleans. Dr. Tyrone later recalled, "I had to borrow my share of the money the five of us had to put up to get started. Oliver Lucas of the Canal Bank was a good friend of mine. He told me that he wouldn't lend a nickel to the group for a clinic, but he would lend me some money personally" (2).

A protégé of the renowned New Orleans gynecologist, Dr. Charles Jefferson Miller, Dr. Tyrone inherited the most active obstetrics and gynecology practice in New Orleans when Miller died in 1936. He had been associated with Miller for 11 years and had established his own reputation. Tyrone brought to the new Ochsner Clinic his busy practice and became the "workhorse" among the five Tulane University Medical School professors who became the Ochsner founders.

LIFE AND MEDICAL CAREER

Curtis Hartman Tyrone was born in Prentiss, Mississippi, on April 18, 1898. As a boy Tyrone chopped wood and picked cotton to help support his family. "We were poor people," he explained (2). Though planning to be a history professor when he enrolled in Mississippi College, he later went on to graduate from Tulane Medical School in 1923. Just before completing his internship at Touro Infirmary, June 15, 1925 became "the luckiest day of my life," Dr Tyrone recalled (1,p57). After making hospital rounds, Tyrone was invited to join the practice of Dr. Charles Jefferson Miller when his internship was complete. "I said yes without even asking him if I'd earn as much as 15 cents a month" (1,p57). Dr. Miller was one of the most prominent gynecologists in the South and later served as President of the American Gynecological Society and the American College of Surgeons.

In 1925, Dr. Tyrone became instructor of clinical obstetrics and a professor of clinical gynecology at Tulane, where he held emeritus status at the time of his death. Because of his association with Miller, Dr. Tyrone brought to the new Ochsner clinic not only an office full of well-to-do leaders of society but also a prestige that was very valuable in the early days.

Dr. Tyrone was described as an "ambitious, energetic young doctor with [a] deftness and finesse in the operating room and an affable personality for charming women of all ages, from young wives with their first pregnancies to dowagers with late-life gynecological problems" (1,p58). Surgeons who worked with him describe a Tyrone operation as "a symphony, an artistic as well as an effective performance" (1,p58). He retired from clinic duties in 1968 but continued to do some consultative work and died after a long, successful life and professional career on July 13, 1982. He was survived by his daughter Ellie, his wife Eloise Mahoney having passed away in 1958.

PERSONAL CHARACTER

Curtis Tyrone tended to avoid professional gatherings. "I'm no orator," he explained (1,p57). He was sensitive to the fact that because of this his national recognition was less than that enjoyed by the other clinic founders. But in New Orleans, his reputation was second to none.

Dr. George T. Schneider, former Section Head of Ochsner Obstetrics and Gynecology, was hired by Dr. Tyrone after leaving the Navy and joined the Ochsner Clinic in 1949. He described Dr. Tyrone as a "very hard working physician with not much time for research. He was an excellent practicing physician. Patients liked and respected him very much because he had a very lovable and likeable way of communicating with them." "Dr. Tyrone used to say that the best referrals did not come from other physicians but from happy, satisfied female patients who were members of the Bridge Club."

According to Dr Schneider, Dr. Tyrone was well liked by colleagues, staff, and trainees including nurses and other personal working in his department, though he "had a temper in the operating room when things did not go right." He recalled that Dr. Tyrone's relaxation was "principally work! But he also liked to smoke cigars and take walks. He never played any sports and took very short vacations."

THE OCHSNER CLINIC

Dr. Tyrone felt that he had paid a higher price than the other founders in joining the group practice that caused so much professional animosity. "I had more friends in the medical profession here than the others did," he recalled. "Some never spoke to me again" (1,p58). Being the youngest of the founders, Tyrone was the most likely to be drafted when the United States entered World War II. Though he was not ultimately asked to serve, one of the armed services committee members later revealed, "You'd be surprised at the telegrams and calls we received from doctors who wanted to get you in the service" (1,p59). Dr. Tyrone assumed that local adversaries saw his being drafted as the only way to break up the fledgling Ochsner Clinic.

CONCLUSION

As with Dr. Burns [*see Summer 2002 –Ed.*], Dr. Tyrone's major contribution to the clinic was hard work. As with the other founders, he had a great deal of compassion for his patients and was a great physician in his field. He saw patients day and night while the others founders were spending part of their time teaching or going to medical meetings. A few times, this brought threats that he would pull out of the clinic and resume his solo practice. Fortunately, Dr. Tyrone stayed the course and said before his death, "I never regretted that I was part of what has become a great institution" (2). All the patients and mothers who flocked to see him and all the babies that he delivered did not regret it either.

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REFERENCES

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