

In Memorium: Clifford Van Meter, MD

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It is hard to accept death at any age but particularly difficult to lose life during one's prime time of productivity and achievement. It has been said "God created all men equal," except when it comes to beauty. Cliff Van Meter was not formed but appeared chiseled from Michelangelo.

His carriage was striking, but he was more than an Adonis. He was gifted with many talents. At Sam Barthe High School as an honor student, he excelled in both baseball and football, and at Tulane University he became an outstanding football player. Thus, he exhibited himself as a true athlete with scholarly performance.

I have known Cliff since he was a medical student, when he spent his summers with me as an extern. It was at that time he confided that he wished to be a heart surgeon, and thus we made plans for him to reach that goal and return to the Ochsner Clinic. Cliff performed his surgical residency at the University of Virginia and completed his thoracic surgery fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis.

For the past 20 years, Cliff discharged his duties as a cardiac surgeon at the Ochsner Clinic with talent, integrity, and honor. During his distinguished career, he performed thousands of cardiac operations. His main interest was in the management of patients with end-stage heart disease. Hence, he directed his efforts toward improving the techniques of heart transplantation. He became passionate about the advancement of mechanical circulatory support. He recognized this modality as a supportive measure as

well as a permanent solution. Cliff was instrumental in the development and improvement of left ventricular assist devices. His work in this field was nationally recognized and gave him contentment and joy. He served as Chief of the Cardiothoracic Surgery and Transplantation Division at the Ochsner Clinic Foundation and as a member of the Board of Directors.

Cliff was a fertile author, contributing to multiple medical journals and textbooks and serving on the editorial board of the *Journal of Heart and Lung Transplantation*. He contributed to local, regional, and national professional organizations and in many acted in a leadership position. He devoted an enormous amount of time to the Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency and served as president and chief executive officer. He was particularly fond of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association, assuming multiple administrative duties. This year, the Nominating Committee of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association unanimously voted to nominate Dr. Van Meter as the next president of the organization. However, his health issues prevented the nomination. Everyone prayed that the plasma cell leukemia could be controlled and that the honor of president could be bestowed upon him. Fate was not on his side.

Cliff had many friends, both within and outside the medical profession. He felt comfortable in most situations, and when he was not comfortable, he did not hesitate to inform those present of his feelings. He showed his true character during Katrina when his family was displaced and lost two homes. He carried on his duties and responsibilities with minimal reproach. This magnificent attribute was exhibited in his gallant fight for life. During his illness, he showed strength in the preservation of a positive frame of mind throughout the trying times of treatment. He never demonstrated frustration, and if anger lingered within him, he did not impose it on others. Cliff's most prized possession was his family. He loved to talk about his children and their accomplishments. His devotion to them is exemplified by the fact that he chose to delay chemotherapy so he could attend the remaining games of his son's football season.

Cliff will be dearly missed by his colleagues and friends, who support his love for his wife, Marianne, and his children, Logan Jade, Clifford Chancellor, and Merritt Grace.

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