

Geneticists Mourn Loss of Dr. Victor A. McKusick, the 'Father of Genetic Medicine'

The American Society of Human Genetics Mourns the Death of Past President and Legendary Society Member, Dr. Victor A. McKusick

BETHESDA, MD – July 22, 2008 – Members of the [American Society of Human Genetics \(ASHG\)](#), both nationally and internationally, are mourning the death of Past President (1975) Victor A. McKusick, M.D., on July 22, 2008. A world renowned physician-scientist, Dr. McKusick is a legend among his peers; he is respected and revered as the 'Father of Genetic Medicine,' as well as a master clinician, scientist, medical historian, writer, teacher and mentor. Dr. McKusick was the recipient of numerous ASHG Awards, including the ASHG Allan Award (1977), which recognized his substantial and far-reaching scientific contributions to the field of human genetics over a sustained period of time.

Dr. McKusick was recently informed by the Society that he had been selected as the winner of the 2008 ASHG Leadership Award. This award is presented to an individual whose professional achievements have fostered and enriched the development of various human genetics disciplines. Dr. McKusick was selected as this year's award recipient for his enduring leadership and vision, which have played a fundamental role in ensuring that the field of human genetics will flourish and successfully assimilate into the broader context of science, medicine and health. The Society was planning to formally present the Leadership Award to Dr. McKusick at the ASHG 58th Annual Meeting, which will be held on November 15, 2008 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Society still plans to honor Dr. McKusick posthumously.

Dr. McKusick was professor emeritus of Medical Genetics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he was widely acknowledged as a legend after spending 60 years there, first as a medical student and then as a faculty member.

ASHG President Aravinda Chakravarti, Ph.D. worked with Dr. McKusick as his colleague in the Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins University. According to Dr. Chakravarti, "Victor McKusick was a genetics hero to all practitioners – both clinicians and scientists. He has left behind a great legacy, the blueprint for transforming medicine through genetics. Although he was an early practitioner our efforts in this area are only now beginning in earnest."

Clearly, Dr. McKusick's contributions to the field of human genetics have been enormous, impacting every discipline within the field. Dr. McKusick began his medical career as a cardiologist, which is where he first developed an interest in the cardiac aspects of inherited disorders of connective tissue. His scientific research studies of Marfan syndrome, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, dwarfism and numerous eponymic syndromes (such as Esterly-McKusick syndrome and McKusick-Cross syndrome) have all led to the identification and mapping of the genes responsible for these inherited disorders.

Among his extraordinary accomplishments, Dr. McKusick is probably most widely known for the initiation of a major genetics reference, Mendelian Inheritance in Man; A Catalog of Human Genes



Victor A. McKusick, MD
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and Genetic Disorders in 1966, which quickly became the evolving and definitive source of information on human genes and genetic disorders. The print edition of this reference book is currently in its 12th edition, and is also now available as an online resource commonly referred to as OMIM (Online Mendelian Inheritance in Man), it is considered a bible for medical geneticists worldwide.

According to Dr. Wylie Burke, ASHG Past President (2007), "Victor McKusick was a visionary in his field and, as early as 1969, he proposed mapping the human genome – an accomplishment that was actually completed in 2003 and has revolutionized the field of human genetics."

ASHG Executive Vice President, Joann A. Boughman, Ph.D., stated that, "Dr. McKusick was a gentle and caring man as well as brilliant and insightful. His legacy will not only be known by his accomplishments in the field of genetics, but his flawless character and his great wisdom and guidance that he freely shared with students and trainees throughout his lifetime."

We are very saddened by this tremendous loss to the human genetics and broader scientific community, but in our continuing search for the causes and treatments for genetic conditions, we will continue to honor his exemplary legacy in the fields of human and medical genetics.