James F. Glenn: a caring but focused leader

CULLEY CARSON

With a string of accolades and awards, Jim Glenn made a huge contribution to the development of urology in the USA and the mentoring of clinicians who would go on to be thought leaders around the world. And as Culley Carson describes, he did it with a great sense of humour.

Pioneer in urology, leader, surgeon, scientist, mentor and friend: all these describe James F. Glenn’s life in academic medicine. Jim was born in Lexington, Kentucky on 10 May 1928 and died there on 10 June 2009. After graduating from the University School in Lexington, Jim studied at the University of Rochester, where he graduated with a BA in 1949. He entered the Duke University School of Medicine, where he was elected a member of Alpha Omega Alpha, graduating with honours in 1952.

After completing two years as a surgical house officer at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, he returned to North Carolina as a US Air Force flight surgeon, commanding the 3308th Hospital. He was influenced by Doctors Edwin Alyea and John Dees to return to Duke as a urology resident, completing his training in urology in 1959. Jim was asked to stay on as a faculty member, but recalled that he wanted to ‘spread my wings’ and accepted a faculty position at Yale. Following two years on the Yale faculty, he once again returned to North Carolina, joining William Boyce at Wake Forest as an Associate Professor.

When Edwin Alyea chose to step down as Duke’s Chief of Urology, Jim Glenn was chosen as his successor. Aged 34, he was the youngest Chief of Urology in the country. It was at Duke that Jim would blossom into the leader and mentor that set the course for his career. With his prodigious energy and unconquerable spirit, he created one of the most outstanding urology programs in the USA. Indeed, its reputation for research, training and clinical excellence continues today.

He created an active alumni network, known as DYSURIA (Duke Youthful Urology Residents Interested in Advancement). Recognising the acute philanthropic needs of academic programs, he also created CURED (Committee for Urologic Research, Education and Development) and raised an endowment to fund urological research and education. He was among the first to recognise the need to educate community urologists.

Jim was editor of Glenn’s Urologic Surgery, which, now in its fifth edition, continues to guide both urology trainees and practitioners in surgical procedures, from simple to complex. He was a frequent speaker around the globe and one of the most entertaining presenters in urology.

MENTOR AND GODFATHER

One of Jim’s greatest contributions was his mentorship. He was ‘godfather’ to countless urologists in US private practice and international academic positions, and trained and mentored future chairs and chiefs at the University of Chicago, Emory, Duke, the University of North Carolina, University of California–Davis, University of South Florida and the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health. He also trained chiefs of paediatric urology at the Mayo Clinic, Texas Children’s Hospital, DuPont Hospital for Children–Jacksonville and the University of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. Many international fellows and residents were trained during his time at Duke from the
In 1980, Jim moved from urology to academic administration, accepting the position of Dean at Emory University School of Medicine, where he was instrumental in choosing many clinical chairs and expanding both facilities and research funding. He then moved to the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, where he served as President of the Mount Sinai Medical Center from 1983 until 1987. After leaving Mount Sinai, he returned to his home town of Lexington, Kentucky, and served in positions at the University of Kentucky Medical Center, including Executive Director of the Markey Cancer Center (1989-1993), Interim Chair of the Department of Surgery (1996-1997) and Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs and Chief of Staff (1993-1995). He served his community as Board Chairman of the Lexington Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital, and was also Chair of the Lexington History Museum Board. He funded the Glenn Building at Transylvania College and endowed professorships in urology at the University of Kentucky and Duke University.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Jim was a member and officer of many prestigious national and international organisations, including the American Surgical Association. He was founding member and President of the Society of University Urologists and President of the Southeast Section of the American Urologic Association, American Association of Genitourinary Surgeons, Clinical Society of Genitourinary Surgeons, Society for Paediatric Urology, Society of Pelvic Surgeons and Société Internationale d’Urologie. His honours include the medal of the Société Internationale d’Urologie (its highest honour) and the Hugh Hampton Young Award from the American Urological Association, as well as its Lifetime Achievement Award. He was honoured by the British Association of Urological Surgeons with the St Paul’s Medal for professional contributions and became an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

All of these positions and honours, however, do not define the man. Jim Glenn was a caring but focused leader – and his humour was legendary. No one who knew Jim could forget the lengthy jokes and humorous stories he told, or the singing of his presidential address at the Clinical Society of Genitourinary Surgeons. His approach to even the most difficult situations put his peers and understudies at ease, and through his self-deprecating humour he was able to reach and relate to all people, young and old, and relieve the stresses of medicine and academic pursuits.