

In memoriam: Georgeanna Seegar Jones, M.D.: her legacy lives on

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Dr. Georgeanna Seegar Jones, internationally known reproductive endocrinologist and pioneer of IVF, passed away at the age of 92. She was the first woman elected as President of the American Fertility Society. (*Fertil Steril*® 2005;84:541–2. ©2005 by American Society for Reproductive Medicine.)

Dr. Georgeanna Seegar Jones passed away at the age of 92 after a long and distinguished national and international career in reproductive medicine. Those of us who were privileged to work with her as medical students, house officers, fellows, and colleagues knew her as a person of great compassion, integrity, and dignity. Dr. Jones was Professor Emeritus of Gynecology and Obstetrics at Eastern Virginia Medical School and at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, as well as honorary Director of the Board at the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine. She and her husband, Dr. Howard W. Jones, Jr., received international recognition for developing the first IVF program in the United States with the first successful conception and birth in 1981. Dr. Georgeanna, as she was known to many, leaves a legacy that lives on in many ways.

Georgeanna Seegar was born in 1912 in Baltimore, Maryland, the daughter of an obstetrician, and became interested in medicine as a young girl. She received her B.A. from Goucher College in 1932 and her M.D. from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1936. There she met Howard W. Jones, Jr., and married him after the completion of his residency. She did her training as a house officer in gynecology at Johns Hopkins and was also a National Cancer Institute investigator at that time. In 1938 she was appointed Director of Johns Hopkins Reproductive Physiology Laboratory and Chief Gynecologist for the Gynecological Endocrine Clinic. She became the first Gynecologic Endocrinologist on a medical school faculty and trained generations of medical students, residents, and fellows both at Hopkins and later at Eastern Virginia Medical School, including such prom-

inent reproductive endocrinologists as Drs. Anne Wentz, Theodore Baramki, Jairo Garcia, Zev Rosenwaks, Eli Adashi, Suheil Muasher, and many, many others. Her legacy lives on in academic medicine.

Even before her work with IVF, Dr. Georgeanna was widely regarded as one of the foremost female scientists in the 20th century and one of the nation's first Reproductive Endocrinologists. Her research had far-reaching implications with respect to infertility and reproductive physiology. Her first medical breakthrough in the late 1930s, identifying hCG as produced by the placenta and not the pituitary gland, laid the foundation for the development of pregnancy tests that are used today. In 1949, she published the first report of luteal phase inadequacy in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Her article reporting the gonadotropin-resistant ovarian syndrome was also a landmark publication, and it was in character for her that she insisted on naming the newly discovered syndrome after her patient, and not herself. She authored many textbooks, more than 350 scientific publications, and received numerous national, state, and international awards. Her legacy lives on in reproductive biology and research.

Dr. Georgeanna Jones continued in her faculty positions at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine until 1978 when she and Dr. Howard Jones retired from Hopkins. Her legacy at Johns Hopkins lives on in the Howard and Georgeanna Jones Division of Reproductive Endocrinology where many distinguished faculty have served up to the present day and is headed by Dr. Howard A. Zacur. The Joneses' "retirement" consisted of moving to Norfolk to join the faculty of the new Eastern Virginia Medical School. On the day they were unpacking in their new home in Norfolk, the first IVF baby was born in England. Dr. Georgeanna was approached then by a local reporter who asked, "Could this be done here?" and she replied, "Certainly. All it would take would be a little money." Months later, the couple's Vital

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Initiation of Pregnancy program was underway, resulting in the birth of Elizabeth Jordan Carr in 1981, the first baby to be conceived by IVF in the United States. Since then the Jones Institute of Reproductive Medicine on the campus of Eastern Virginia Medical School has assisted thousands of couples from throughout the world with successful IVF.

A pioneer for women in the medical profession, Dr. Georgeanna served as a mentor for several generations of female medical students. As a young female medical student in 1976, I personally will never forget the first time I saw Dr. Georgeanna Jones at the Johns Hopkins Reproductive Endocrinology clinic. She came into the clinic in her crisp long white coat and sat at the conference table in front of a huge pile of charts. She then proceeded to grill a nervous third year resident in his white suit, tie and white shoes, on the details of each and every chart, test results and plan for every patient to be seen that Thursday morning. She expected precise answers and most of the time she got them, and it was clear that for her, patient care was paramount. Her fellows were in the room, including Dr. John Rock, but they spoke only when questioned directly by Dr. Georgeanna, or when necessary to come to the aid of the resident. At the completion of the chart review, Dr. Georgeanna Jones turned to the students in the back of the room and asked invitingly “Now do any of you have questions about what you have heard?” I asked her “What is the LH surge?” Dr. Georgeanna Jones then got up, came to the back table, and patiently explained the complexities of this concept along with clinical examples. Can one imagine her describing the major construct of reproductive endocrinology to a 22-year-old medical student on the first clinical clerkship? She then instructed me “Now you go and read about this and come talk to me again next Thursday.” And she certainly made sure her assignment was completed the following week! How fortunate to have had this unforgettable interaction with a giant in the field who ultimately was very influential in my medical career. Fond memories also exist of her retreats on Gibson Island where she gave sage advice on handling a full-time medical career with responsibilities as a wife and mother. “You must have help so that you can create time for your family,” Dr. Georgeanna said often. She herself was successful in all arenas including having three children who are successful professionals today. As a humanist she brought the position of a professional woman to the table in a time when very few were there. Her legacy lives on in women in medicine.

Dr. Georgeanna was elected President of the American Fertility Society in 1970, the first woman to reach that position (Fig. 1). Her presidency was notable for her thoughtful discussions on the impact of reproductive technologies on society as well as the implications of advances in fertility control on women and their future. Dr. Georgeanna Jones had a significant influence on the Society by involving many new AFS members in her committees and programs. During the dedication of the Howard and Georgeanna Jones Institute of Reproductive Medicine, Dr. Edwin P. Peterson spoke on behalf of AFS stating,

FIGURE 1

Dr. Georgeanna Seegar Jones as ASRM President.



Damewood. Obituary: Dr. Georgeanna Seegar Jones.

“No president of the American Fertility Society has changed the direction of that group in any one year more than did Georgeanna Seegar Jones during her tenure as president from 1970 to 1971. Under her leadership the foundation for subsequent dramatic growth in our Society was poured” (1). Her legacy lives on at the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, and will continue long into the 21st century.

Dr. Georgeanna is survived by her husband of 64 years, Dr. Howard W. Jones, Jr. Their home was always open, and she was known as a warm and gracious hostess. She was a loving wife and mother of three children—Dr. Howard W. Jones III, a gynecologic oncologist in Nashville, Dr. Georgeanna Jones Klingensmith, an endocrinologist in Denver, and Lawrence M. Jones, an attorney in Denver. She was also a loving grandmother of 7 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild. Her legacy will live long in her family, as well as in her extended family at ASRM for many years to come.

REFERENCE

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