



**J. Leonard Goldner, MD  
1918-2005**

On December 20, 2005, J. Leonard Goldner died at the age of eighty-seven. A native of Omaha, Nebraska, he graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1939. He continued his education at the University of Nebraska, receiving a bachelor of science and a medical degree in 1943. During World War II, he served in the South Pacific as a medical officer in the United States Navy.

Dr. Goldner completed his residency training at Duke University, and in 1950 he joined the Duke Orthopaedic Surgery staff, eventually rising to serve as Chief of the Division from 1967 through 1984. He was awarded the James B. Duke Professorship in 1979. Although he retired in 1988, Dr. Goldner continued to teach and attend conferences and clinics until two months before his death.

During his career, Dr. Goldner was active in various orthopaedic associations, serving as President of the American Orthopaedic Association, the Southern Medical Association, and the North Carolina Orthopaedic Association. He also served as the President of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society. In 1981, Dr. Goldner was presented with the Distinguished Civilian Service Award from the United States Secretary of the Army, and in 2004 he received the AOA-Smith and Nephew Endoscopy Distinguished Clinician Educator Award, which "represents national recognition of exceptional orthopaedic clinician educators."

Dr. Goldner was a self-disciplinarian, a dedicated teacher, a tireless surgeon, a respected leader, and, above all, a humanitarian. He was unparalleled as a teacher and personi-

fied the Socratic method; as a result, all of those who trained under him became better teachers themselves.

His attitude was confident, positive, and optimistic, and it carried over to all of his trainees. As a mentor, his enthusiasm was infectious and he stimulated his trainees and faculty to higher accomplishments than they ever thought possible. He was not negative about anyone or anything. He did not believe in wasting time and energy complaining about situations, administrators, or imagined competition that he or his colleagues could not change or control. He was committed to "moving on" in a positive and constructive manner in order to help others and also himself. The Duke orthopaedic staff, past and present, all recall his famous "Goldnergrams" or "Goldnerisms," many of which dispensed sage advice. For example, on examining a patient's foot in the clinic to see if the surgery was successful (i.e., that the tarsal bones of the triple arthrodesis had united), he remarked: "There is motion present; it's imperceptible, but I can feel it." His students and colleagues indeed believed that he could perceive the imperceptible.

Dr. Goldner was more than a tireless surgeon; he was a complete physician. In his formal lessons, but mostly by his example, he taught how to evaluate patients through talking to them and also listening to them, learning not only about their complaints and mechanism of injury but also about their work, family, social behavior, and desires and expectations. He never looked at radiographs or other images until he had obtained a complete history and performed a very thorough physical examination.

By his practice, Dr. Goldner proved that a warm and compassionate engagement with the patient was 90% responsible for gaining the respect of the patient even if a precise diagnosis was not made. He demonstrated that appropriate facial expressions, body movement, a calm voice, and an overall friendly attitude were the main ingredients of a good and lasting doctor-patient relationship.

He never appeared hurried or rushed, and his colleagues never heard him speak in an angry or harsh voice to a patient, nurse, attendant, or, for that matter, to anyone around him. He often stated that when communication with a patient became difficult, the caregiver should remember that "the patient is sick—not you."

Dr. Goldner strongly believed that perfection should be the goal of all surgeons, yet he appreciated that few of his trainees or colleagues could achieve such an ideal. He had no favorites, and the residents, fellows, and faculty were all a part of his family. However, he was also a competitor, as those who played tennis or golf with him will attest. He did not concede anything.

He never wore a beeper or carried a cell phone and once said, "I never had an important phone call in my life; I can be found if needed." Yet he immediately called a referring physician, especially when a patient sought his advice after leaving another physician. He contacted the physician not only to inform him or her about his recommendations but also to reassure the physician. Dr. Goldner had much to teach

about building and maintaining relationships. He frequently emphasized the importance of maintaining a sense of humor in our work, especially the ability to laugh at oneself at times to maintain emotional stability.

To his friends and colleagues, it was not so important that he was president of many organizations but rather that he never campaigned for any of those honors. He never neglected his family or friends, and was truly a humanitarian of the highest order.

He stressed the importance of being perceptive about

patients, colleagues, and oneself—a necessary quality for a physician. In relation to his illness, one of his last statements was, “You play the hand you were dealt.”

A magnificent giant has fallen and there will never be another one to match him. Whether one was a family member, friend, colleague, or student, his sound principles will remain with all who knew him.

—*J.R.U.*

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