



# Dedication to Dr. John L. Esterhai

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It is with great pride that we dedicate the 25<sup>th</sup> Volume of the University of Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Journal to Dr. John L. Esterhai, who has provided outstanding clinical care and academic excellence to the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania over the last 39 years.

Dr. Esterhai was born in Philadelphia on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946 and raised in Roxborough. His great grandfather was a haberdasher in Manayunk. When just four years old, he had a ruptured appendix, prompting his fascination with medicine and caring for others. His primary care physician, a World War Two veteran and family friend, made frequent house calls and served as one of his first medical role models.

After graduating from Central High School in 1964, he attended Gettysburg College. His interest in Orthopaedics started with a left knee total medial meniscectomy - long before arthroscopy - when one of the marks of an excellent surgeon was being able to remove the entire meniscus with a Smiley knife. Air Force ROTC helped to defray the costs of his junior and senior years in college and senior year at Temple University School of Medicine. He and Carol married in 1969. He finished his General Surgery PGY-1 year at Temple in 1973.

In 1973, during the war in Vietnam, the Air Force needed flight surgeons more than orthopedists. During training in Aerospace Medicine at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio there was perfect weather and abundant time for Dr. Esterhai to obtain a private pilot license. From 1973 to 1976 he and Carol were stationed at Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa, Japan. During this time, he served as a Flight Surgeon with the 44<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, caring for fighter pilots, air crews, and their families.

In 1976, Dr. Esterhai returned to Philadelphia to pursue Orthopaedic training at the University of Pennsylvania with Chairmen Drs. Edgar Ralston and Carl Brighton. During his research year his projects involved electrical stimulation of osteogenesis.

Drs. Esterhai and Cuckler shared the role of administrative chief resident and received the Deforest Willard Award for their outstanding service. After graduation in 1980, he was selected to remain on staff at Penn to help with Dr. Brighton's large patient volume because of the latter's international reputation for fracture nonunion care.

As an attending, Dr. Esterhai focused his energy on the care of patients who were unable to adequately care for themselves, a philosophy that has driven his entire career. He sought to establish relationships with patients, interested in the long term care of their problems. This coupled with his earlier personal experience with prolonged treatment after the ruptured appendix led to his interest in the care of patients with musculoskeletal infections and nonunions. There were no peripherally inserted central catheters or sophisticated soft tissue transfers. Patients frequently spent more than six weeks in the hospital, receiving intravenous antibiotics,



extended wound care, and hyperbaric oxygen treatment. It was in the care of these patients that he also established a close relationship with the members of the Department of Infectious Disease.

As a young attending he joined a group of Infectious Disease physicians and orthopaedic surgeons in founding the Musculoskeletal Infection Society (MSIS) in 1989 in an effort to collaboratively advance knowledge in the field of musculoskeletal infection and its treatment. The MSIS has been instrumental in improving the quality of care for people with musculoskeletal infections. As one of its founding members, Dr. Esterhai's focus on research and clinical care in the areas of osteomyelitis, antibiotic therapies, and the use of hyperbaric oxygen have resulted in his world-renowned expertise in the area. He has served as MSIS President twice, in 1997 and 2008.

Dr. Esterhai has had a deep commitment to veterans of the American military. Through his personal experience in the Air Force and his robust practice at the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center (PVAMC) he has devoted considerable time and resources in their clinical care. As Chief of the Orthopaedic service at PVAMC since 2001, he interacts daily with administration, staff, and faculty involved in the treatment of US Military Veterans with musculoskeletal needs.

As a researcher, Dr. Esterhai's primary interest has been in the field of musculoskeletal infection, particularly in the setting of traumatic injuries. He has produced two hundred twenty-five textbook chapters, original papers, and abstracts, been an editor for one research textbook, and presented nationally and internationally. He helped develop a platform for the research program at the PVAMC run by Drs. Mauck and Dodge.

Dr. Esterhai was privileged to work in Haiti with the surgical team from the University of Maryland after the 2010 earthquake. He and his family have worked with Orthopaedics Overseas in St. Lucia and faith-based Medical Ministry International in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. He is on the Board of Directors of Orthopaedics Overseas, and he is a lifetime member of the Christian Medical and Dental Association. He would be among the first to remind that to whom much is given, much will be required, while affirming that none of this would be possible without the dedicated care supplied by the men and women of the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

Dr. Esterhai is described by his peers as a consummate physician, one loved by his patients, students, and staff. At the University of Pennsylvania, he is regularly mentioned by residents and attendings as an inspiration and as a role model to emulate. His patients are known to travel from around the country to see him, and many have been under his care for decades as they respect his opinion above all other's. Dr. Esterhai exemplifies the traditional role of the physician who places patient needs above his own, and beyond his medical and surgical expertise, serves as a confident leader in his community. In the operating room, he ceaselessly engages the residents, sharing his surgical experience and encouraging physicians to always give the best care possible. Residents

and colleagues regularly mention his calm yet commanding approach in the operating room, while maintaining his trademark humility, politeness, and kindness.

Outside of the field, Dr. Esterhai is recognized as a devoted and loving family man. Carol and he celebrated their 46<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They have two grown children and six grand-children under the age of eleven. He frequently references their daughter and son and their families as a blessing in their lives. Carol and he share the joy at having them all within an hour of their home.

It is impossible to capture the breadth of Dr. Esterhai's accomplishments, and the depth of his impact, within the confines of this journal. His glowing personality, his compassion, and his selfless focus on the well-being of those around him have served to inspire thirty-six years of graduating Orthopaedic Surgeons who have trained under his phenomenal mentorship. His contributions to musculoskeletal knowledge cannot be overstated, as his vision has resulted in changes to the very practice of Orthopaedic Surgery. Dr. Esterhai continues to see patients, teach, and conduct innovative research at Penn Orthopaedics, further solidifying his profound impact on his field and securing his legacy. Most importantly, he will be forever remembered by all who have had the honor and privilege to work with him as a dear friend and good man.