

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-2060

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

DAVID A. RYTAND
(1908 - 1991)

David A. Rytand, Arthur L. Bloomfield Professor of Medicine Emeritus, died on November 23, 1991 after a long illness. He had been at Stanford for 65 years and was one of the medical schools most distinguished scholars, clinicians, and teachers.

David Rytand was born in San Francisco and attended the public schools there. He entered Stanford as a freshman in 1926 and continued on to the medical school, receiving his M.D. in 1932. He then began a 59 year career in the Department of Medicine, as an intern and resident initially, and then as a full-time faculty member. In 1984 he recalled these early days in a delightful monograph, *Medicine and the Stanford University School of Medicine circa 1932: The Way It Was*.

In the 1930s and 1940s he achieved high distinction as a critical and original scholar in medicine as well as prominence as a clinical consultant and teacher. He had wide interests, including the physiology of the kidney and many areas of internal medicine. A study published in 1937 on the number and size of the glomeruli of the kidney in mammals of widely varying body size quickly became a classic, and was still being cited regularly more than 50 years later. After World War II he increasingly focused his work in the field of heart disease. However, he resisted the exclusive specialization on heart disease that developed rapidly at this time, and retained his interest and professional identity in the broad field of internal medicine.

Upon the retirement of Dr. Bloomfield in 1954 Dr. Rytand became the Chairman of the Department of Medicine, and in 1958 he became the first Arthur L. Bloomfield Professor of Medicine. This was the first endowed chair in the School of Medicine. He served as Chairman through the transitional period in the late 1950s in which the medical school remodeled its faculty and curriculum, established a new emphasis on basic research, and moved from San Francisco to the new Medical

Center on the university campus. He stepped aside as Chairman in 1960 and returned to his first love as a clinician, clinical teacher and scholar.

He became a uniquely popular clinical teacher among the new generation of medical students and residents. He also returned to research, primarily on his long-time hobby of atrial flutter, an especially intriguing type of irregularity of the heart beat, since it appeared likely to have a specifically identifiable mechanism, if only someone could elucidate it. He acquired new data, using the opportunities now available from the development of surgery on the heart, and convincingly established the long-controversial theory of circus movement around the entire right atrium as the mechanism.

The circus movement mechanism implies that the electrical activation of the atrium is continuous and exactly repetitive, and hence that the recording of it in the human electrocardiogram should be perfectly regular, constant in waveform, and continuously undulating. Dr. Rytand delighted in promoting simple optical methods to demonstrate these features, using a cylindrical lens, or even more simply viewing the electrocardiographic recording at an angle to foreshorten the waveform. Because of the large variety of atrial arrhythmias that appear in electrocardiograms, these features are still not widely emphasized sufficiently, although their validity has been amply proven.

Upon becoming Emeritus in 1975, Dr. Rytand moved to the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, a major affiliated hospital where much of the clinical teaching of Stanford medical students takes place. There he established a new legacy of excellence in clinical teaching. He returned to the Stanford Medical Center in 1980, where he served as Director of Medical Alumni Relations. He also continued to teach medical students; until shortly before his death he met regularly with students to discuss electrocardiograms.

David Rytand was a member of the American Association of Physicians, the American Society of Clinical Investigation, the Western Society of Clinical Investigation (President in 1954), the Western Association of Physicians (President in 1959), and the California Academy of Medicine (President in 1985). In 1984 he received the Albion Walter Hewlett Award of the Department of Medicine, one of the most prestigious awards in the School of Medicine. On this occasion Professor Alan Barbour wrote that David had achieved immortality by accomplishing several

notable goals. "First, you must discover a basic law of nature. Rytand's Law, as it is now known, was discovered in 1951: 'The prognosis for a patient with myocardial infarction is worse when anticoagulants are given to someone else'... Now, the second rule of immortality: you must have a disease named after you. Dave described nine patients with a unique late diastolic murmur associated with calcification of the mitral annulus and A-V block in 1946... This is known variously, but we prefer 'la maladie de Rytand' as it is described in the French literature... Of all this, when asked in a recent interview to describe what he took to be his greatest achievements, Dave answered simply, 'Two things. I taught students. And I listened to patients.'"

David leaves his widow, Nancy, a daughter Sally Plaisted of Menlo Park, two sons, David H. Rytand of Anacortes, Washington and William Rytand of Palo Alto, and six grandchildren.

E. William Hancock, Chair
William P. Creger
Roy Cohn
Marcus Krupp