

Dr. Edward Annis: A Caring Physician of the World

Editor's Note: Edward R. Annis, MD, from Miami Shores, FL, received the Caring Physicians of the World book, containing his profile, from Dr. Yank Coble during the AMA Interim Meeting in Dallas, TX, November 6, 2005. He is one of two U.S. physicians so honored. (See news item December 8 edition of FMA's E-News/FMAonline.org).

At age 92, Dr. Annis continues to speak at state and specialty medical society meetings. Recently widowed, he still has a family support base of 8 children, 14 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. Following are excerpted portions of the profile printed in the Caring Physicians of the World book edited by Dr. Coble and written by Nigel Duncan, WMA Public Relations Consultant.

The term "Caring Physicians" immediately conjures up images of those who spend their lives serving patients in poor and disease-stricken environments. There are, however, other types of caring physicians, with roles equally as important. These are the physicians whose caring is manifest by working in the public arena to influence public policy to meet the healthcare needs of patients and the physicians who serve them.

Few physicians have been better exponents of this type of care than Edward Annis, MD. He is rightly regarded as one of the giants of American medicine. Elected to the position of president of the American Medical Association in 1963-64 and as president of the World Medical Association in the same year, he became known as an excellent leader and spokesman for the medical profession, not only in the USA, but throughout the world. He is a truly gifted orator and has an exceptional understanding of the advocacy process for developing health policy. These qualities were great assets in his role as advocate for physicians and patients in debates with politicians and presidents, reaching millions of people through America's national TV networks.

Dr. Annis developed his debating skills at a young age. At the Marquette School of Medicine in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he was a member of the debating team, and later he demonstrated his skills in the Junior Chamber of Commerce, where he spoke regularly. Dr. Annis also excelled in caring for patients as a practicing physician. In his early medical career he practiced surgery in Tallahassee, Florida before moving to Miami, Florida where he became Chief of Surgery at Mercy Hospital. In all, he practiced medicine for more than 25 years.

In 1960, Dr. Annis' medical and social leadership skills became more evident as he engaged in the national debate on the possible change of the U.S. health care system to a socialized model, and the introduction of Medicare. These were complex issues, but in a statesmanlike manner he managed to defend the best interest of patients and the medical profession and play a leading role in the shaping of the health care system. He was particularly passionate about access to health care for all patients saying, "My whole approach is that


no person in the nation should be denied medical care if they need it, whether they can pay for it or not."

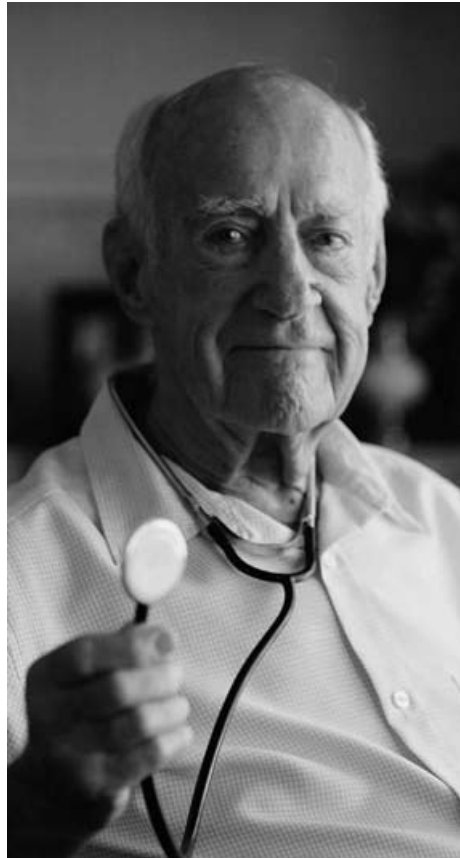
During the 1960 U.S. Presidential campaign, the American Medical Association was asked to appoint a spokesperson to debate with Senator Hubert Humphrey. Because of his growing reputation as an effective advocate and spokesman for the profession, the AMA requested Dr. Annis to take part in this debate. At the time he held no official leadership position in the association, illustrating the esteem in which he was held by his peers.

That televised debate was watched by 30 million people. Overnight Dr. Annis became a household name in the USA. A week later he was invited to debate the then labour leader Walter Reuther. This time the debate was watched by 40 million people. As a result of these highly publicized debates, Dr. Annis was thrust into the limelight and within two years he was elected as the president of the AMA. In addition, he was elected as president of the U.S. section of the International College of Surgeons during 1964-1965.

As AMA president, Dr. Annis was most effective as an articulate voice for organized medicine and a strong critic of inefficiencies and unnecessary bureaucracy in health care. In 1962 he gave a famous speech in Madison Square Garden to a television audience of 30 million, presenting the physicians' rebuttal to moves toward socialized medicine in the USA. Despite the fact that these were difficult times and often a highly emotional debate, Dr. Annis ably managed to represent the views of the medical profession in a coherent and constructive manner.

On one occasion, he was invited by President J.F. Kennedy to visit the White House to discuss the views of the medical profession on Medicare. Although there were some differences of opinion,

the President showed respect for the arguments presented by Dr. Annis. There was specific concern that too much regulation would ultimately harm the health care system, a view still held by Dr. Annis today. The current health system, he says, is doing harm to the medical profession. He adds, "During the last ten years of my 25 years in active practice, the biggest difficulty in practicing medicine was the steady increase in rules, regulations, mandates and paperwork. This has resulted in time lost for the core function of physicians - the proper care of patients, while enormously increasing the cost of medical care." 



Edward R. Annis, MD