In Memory of Norval Christy, MD

Dr. Norval Christy died peacefully on Sunday, April 28, at age 91 at his retirement home in Duarte, California. Dr. Christy was famous along with his wife, Dorothy, for their dedicated service to the cataract poor of Taxila, Pakistan. Originally appointed by the Presbyterian Church to help with the exodus of refugees from India into Pakistan in 1947, they eventually were assigned to work at the Christian Hospital in Taxila. His reputation of doing excellent cataract surgery for the cataract poor was established, and Dr. Christy added to that prestige over his many years of service there. He and his colleagues performed some 300 cataract procedures each day for several decades. Dr. Christy alone accounted for probably 200,000 cataract procedures during his lifetime.

Dr. Christy was a graduate of Westminster College (PA) and Harvard Medical School with an internship and residency at Hartford Hospital in Connecticut. He was certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology and received an honorary Doctor of Science from Westminster in 1987.

With an inquiring mind and working with Dr. Jan Worst of Holland, Dr. Christy developed techniques to not only make but insert intraocular lenses early on into the eyes of many of the cataract poor. He was one of the earlier members into the IIIC and was asked to speak at the IIIC (International Intraocular Implant Club) meeting in Nagoya, Japan in 1978. There he presented a study of several hundred successful cataract procedures including intraocular lens implants. His visual and sterile technique results rivaled that observed in major university settings in America. He challenged that group of pioneer implant surgeons to develop a high quality but low cost intraocular lens for the world’s poor that would cost $10 or less within five years. The IIIC accepted that responsibility and began working towards that goal. Eventually, this nascent move resulted in the work of the World Cataract Foundation. In 1984, a team from the World Cataract Foundation shot on-site in Taxila an award-winning film, “The Miracle of Taxila,” that is still a remarkable and timely documentary.

Because of his pioneering work and challenge in developing intraocular lenses for the world’s poor, Dr. Christy was honored by the World Cataract Foundation for his lifetime work and challenge to the Foundation and was given the Vision Award for 2013. His health at the time prevented him from traveling to Tennessee for presentation of this award. However, a special video recording of him was done, which was presented at that meeting.

It was remarkable that this 91 year old dedicated ophthalmologist still had a sharp mind and recalled so much about his lifetime of work with his wife, Dorothy. He described in detail the meeting in Nagoya in 1978 where he challenged the IIIC to develop a low cost but high quality lens for the world’s cataract poor.

Dr. Christy is survived by Dorothy, his wife of sixty-five years and by their five children and their spouses, 16 grandchildren, and eight living great-grandchildren.

There will be a Memorial Service in celebration of Norval’s life on May 18, 2013 at 2 PM in Packard Hall, Westminster Gardens, 1420 Santo Domingo Ave., Duarte, California. Memorial gifts can be made to Christian Hospital, Taxila, Pakistan, by sending those donations to “Presbyterian World Missions”, PO Box 643700, Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700, including the code “E865364” in the memo line on the check, and including a note that these gifts are being given in honor or memory of Norval Christy.

Jerre Minor Freeman, MD
6485 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, TN 38119