



Gerald Besson MD

December 19, 1921 - January 7, 2017

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Gerald "Gerry" Besson M.D., FACP, Santa Clara County physician and active community leader, passed away on January 7, 2017 at his home in Los Altos, California. He was 95. His life was full, productive, and exemplified community service at its best professionally and personally, both locally and nationally.

Born and raised in New York City, Dr. Besson was a graduate of City College of New York. From 1943 through 1946, he served in the United States Navy training Navy pilots in oxygenation and high altitude safety procedures. That experience led him to Boston University School of Medicine, from which he graduated in 1950 with Honors. After post-graduate training specializing in Internal Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, he settled in Los Altos in 1955 and opened a private medical practice in Sunnyvale, which he maintained until his retirement in 1991. In addition, he held a clinical teaching position at Stanford University School of Medicine for 35 years.

Dr. Besson was a founding member of El Camino Hospital and was elected by his colleagues as the hospital's first Chief of Staff and Chairman of the Executive Committee. At El Camino, he was involved in the development of

one of the first computer driven medical records systems in the country. He also served on the Foothill-DeAnza Community College Board of Trustees from 1978 through 1991, including a term as Board President. He was a long-time member of the Santa Clara County Medical Society and Sunnyvale Rotary and was elected President of each of those organizations.

Dr. Besson's contribution to the practice of medicine spread nationwide. Representing Santa Clara County as a delegate to the California Medical Society he actively campaigned for the passage of the original Medicare bill and was invited by the United States Surgeon General to aid in the implementation of the law. That led to a 10-year period as consultant to the then Department of Health Education and Welfare. Most notably, he spearheaded a program for establishment of an Institute of Professional Standards where, as Chancellor, he created a nationwide program of Physician Peer Review standards for hospital patient admission and standards of care. During this period, he was also a member of the National Board of Medical Examiners establishing standards for an examination of clinical skills as part of medical licensure requirements. Throughout, he always considered himself a "country doctor" and hands-on patient care remained his priority until retirement.

An avid outdoorsman, Gerry was certified National Ski Patrol for 27 years and pioneered the Alpine Meadows Doctors Ski Patrol providing unique on-the-hill medical care at that resort. In addition to skiing, his active life included leading Sierra Club backpacking trips; fly-fishing with his own hand tied flies; mountaineering including summiting Mt. Rainier; running marathons; sailing; tennis and golf.

His proudest achievements, however, were those involving family. Gerry and Elly, his beloved wife of 73 years, lived a fulfilling life together, raising five successful daughters whom, in turn are leading full and active lives. He will be

deeply missed by his family, patients and friends. In addition to his wife, he is survived by five daughters; Bobbi Blake, Jann Besson, Amy Forte, Heidi Star and Tamar Besson; two sons-in-law Vincent Forte and Barry Star; nine grandchildren and six great grandchildren. Dr. Besson preferred there be no memorial service and suggested donations may be made to El Camino Hospital Foundation or Foothill DeAnza Community College Foundation.