OBITUARY

John Francis Busey, MD
1907–1989

John Francis Busey was born on February 21, 1907, in Frisco City, Alabama, the son of a physician. Always a superior student, he graduated from Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now Auburn University, at the age of 19 in 1926. He graduated from Tulane University School of Medicine in 1930, and subsequently interned at the City Hospital of Mobile, Alabama. He had further postgraduate training at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and in the New York Postgraduate Hospital. During the Second World War, he served as a US Army Medical Corps in the European Theater of Operations with the 8th Field Hospital, with several evacuation hospitals and the 68th General Hospital. By the end of the war he had risen to the rank of Colonel. Following his military service, he accepted the position of Chief of Staff at the Atlanta Veterans Administration Hospital and was appointed Instructor of Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine. With his main motivation the desire to become more closely associated with clinical medicine and patient care, in 1950 he accepted a position as Chief, Medical Service at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1955, when the University of Mississippi School of Medicine was moved to Jackson as a four year school, Dr. Busey was appointed Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine. By the time he had retired as Chief, Medical Service in 1969, he has risen to the rank of Clinical Professor of Medicine. After his VA retirement, he became the first director of Medical Education at Mississippi Baptist Hospital in Jackson, Mississippi, a position he held until his second retirement in 1983.

Prior to coming to Mississippi, Dr. Busey had only seen a couple of patients with deep fungal infections, and he had never seen a patient with either histoplasmosis or blastomycosis. His Mississippi clinical experience provided him with numerous patients with serious fungal infections to study, and the vast majority of these were undiagnosed at the time of presentation. Using his tireless intellect, his inquiring mind and his keen powers of observation, he soon became an acknowledged expert and everyone’s free consultant when a patient had a suspected or proven fungal infection.

In 1960 he became the Chairman of the VA-Armed Forces Committee on Blastomycosis, and a member on the Committee on Histoplasmosis. The Committee of Blastomycosis did a retrospective study of this disease in Veterans Administration Hospitals, and the product of this study, an article written by Dr. Busey, stands as a landmark in the blastomycosis literature (Blastomycosis: A review of 198 collected cases in Veterans Administration Hospitals. ARRD 1963; 89: 659–672). The second major contribution to the
literature of this committee was a comparative study of 2-hydroxystilbamidine and amphotericin B in the treatment of blastomycosis. This study proved the superiority of amphotericin B. During the twelve year life of this committee, Dr. Busey became perhaps the world’s leading authority on blastomycosis.

In his office at the Veterans Administration Hospital, he kept a wall-sized map of the United States on which was a pin identifying every case of blastomycosis ever reported in this country. Included were pins identifying patients reported in literature as well as anecdotally reported cases from physicians passing through. Dr. Busey immediately would obtain demographic data on these anecdotal cases, and if the diagnosis satisfied his strict criteria, another pin was added to the map.

Dr. Busey’s career offered him the opportunity to experience all major therapies of serious fungal infections. He utilized everything from antigen desensitization to iodides to stilbamidine to 2-hydroxystilbamidine, amphotericin B and ketoconazole. His research lab focused on improving serodiagnosis of histoplasmosis and blastomycosis. He was one of the earliest investigators to utilize double immunodiffusion for the diagnosis of histoplasmosis and was the first to develop a clinically useful immunodiffusion test for blastomycosis.

Dr. Busey was certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine in 1948. He was a fellow of the American College of Physicians, a consultant to the Fungus Committee of the American College of Chest Physicians, a member of the Mississippi State Medical Association, American Medical Association, American Heart Association, American Thoracic Society, American Society of Microbiology, The Medical Mycological Society of the Americas, The International Society for Human and Animal Mycology, and the American Society of Tropical Medicine. He served as President of the Mississippi Lung Association and was on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors of that organization for many years. He was on the Board of Directors of the American Thoracic Society and served for a number of years on the Committee on Therapy which published many papers of interest on the treatment of various lung disorders. He used his influence to strengthen the American Thoracic Society’s interest in fungus diseases, and the Society subsequently published a monograph on fungal diseases authored by Dr. Busey.

John received many awards during his career. In 1984 the Mississippi Lung Association awarded him a Distinguished Service Award for his many years of contributions to the prevention and treatment of lung diseases. In 1981 the Medical Mycological Society of the Americas awarded him the Rhoda Benham Award, the ultimate recognition from his peers of his contribution to the field of medical mycology. At the time of his retirement in 1983, the Auditorium of the Mississippi Baptist Medical Center was named the John Busey Educational Auditorium, and a magnificent bronze plaque with his likeness on it was placed near the entrance.

To those of us who were fortunate enough to work with Dr. Busey, he is best remembered as a gentleman of high intellect, incredible energy, infectious enthusiasm, great humor, and limited patience. He had an exhaustive memory, a tremendous grasp of the broad field of Internal Medicine, and an unflagging interest in continuing education. He was a man of action with little patience for bureaucratic red tape, and unreasonable rules and regulations that intimidated others were no match for John Busey. He had very little tolerance for medical professionals whose standard of care was less than his own. He left a large and devoted following of former medical students, house staff and colleagues.

Beyond medicine, Dr. Busey had an enduring interest in his garden in which he grew championship quality camellias. He always enjoyed a game of chance, and was a great fan of baseball. He took annual pilgrimages to Florida during spring training, and when his health began to fail and limited his ability to go to baseball games, he derived great pleasure from being an owner of his own Rotisserie League Fantasy baseball team.