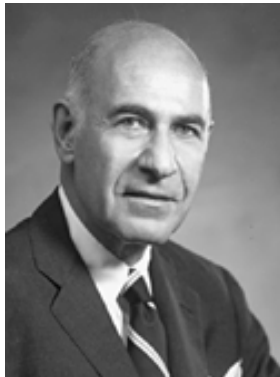


## Physician Assistant Pioneer: William G. Anlyan, M.D.

by Ann Bliss, BS, RN, MSW, LCSW

Crucial to the recorded history of any profession are its behind-the-scenes, backstage dramas as well as its featured players. Although Dr. Eugene Stead is the recognized father of the Physician Assistant profession, few people know that William Anlyan, M.D. was its uncle. As Dean of Duke University's School of Medicine, Anlyan stood staunchly behind Stead's decade-long innovative, but ill-fated, Masters Nurse Practitioner program. In addition, Anlyan's influential leadership helped Stead's subsequent PA concept gain massive funding with HEW as well as national replication.

### Background



One of three boys, William Anlyan was born in 1925 in Alexandria, Egypt where he attended an English school and Victoria College. Having excelled in the Oxford-Cambridge Higher Tests, he entered Yale University in 1941 at age 16. It was the beginning of World War II and his father's connections secured for him and his brothers safe transport on a Liberty Ship in America. Anlyan earned his B.S. in zoology from Yale in fifteen months and went on to its medical school.

*“Around 1965, Gene {Stead} came to see me. He told me about the 22,000 corpsmen trained in health care who were discharged each year from the military. Unlike pilots or engineers in the services, they had no place to go in civilian life. He proposed taking on three former corpsmen and seeing how they would fit in the non-military health system. The main reason for informing me was to ask my help in the event that the nursing profession might feel threatened. It was the beginning of the Physician Assistant Program.”* *The Lighter Side of Giants. An Essay by Anlyan, William G. (Essay) in The Magic of Medicine at Duke: A History in Our Own Words, Volume I, Duke University, 2009. p.1-11.*

In 1949, he went to Duke University for his residency in thoracic surgery, became full professor of surgery in 1961 and Dean of the School of Medicine in 1964. His clinical work, research, teaching and numerous publications won him the prestigious Abraham Flexner Award in 1980.

It is most unusual for a physician to become president of a University—a post traditionally given to a scholar Ph.D. However, owing to his remarkable administrative skills, he was named Chancellor of Duke University in 1988. Upon retirement, Anlyan was appointed Chancellor Emeritus and Trustee of the Duke Endowment.

### Collaboration

The relationship between Stead and Anlyan is a case study of collaboration, and one of the cornerstones of the PA profession. Far from professional jealousy of each other, thoracic surgeon Anlyan and internist Stead worked unusually closely clinically. They made mutual referrals and Stead attended Anlyan's surgeries on his patients. In a return compliment, Anlyan once quipped that everything he knew about medicine, he learned from that consummate teacher, Dr. Stead.

Dr. Anlyan solidly backed Stead and Superintendent of Medical Nursing Thelma Ingles' decade-long effort to train Masters Nurse Practitioners for Duke's Hanes Ward to become what today are called “hospitalist.” Awarded a \$50,000 Rockefeller Foundation grant, Stead and Ingles developed a Masters NP curriculum with substantial depth in clinical medicine and went on to

educate several classes.<sup>1</sup> However, they applied for accreditation several times to the National League for Nursing, only to be refused each time—not for reasons of quality, but for ideology. The NLN and the American Nurses Association were bitterly opposed on two counts:

1. NPs were being prepared by doctors to practice medicine.
2. NPs would practice under physician, not nursing, supervision.

Stead and Ingles persevered, however, until a relatively unknown but pivotal incident. Both Duke's Dean of Nursing and the hospital Director went to the local newspaper behind Anlyan and Stead to question the safety of NPs practicing medicine on patients. They further threatened to close 73 beds on the Hanes Ward if the Masters NP program persisted. For Anlyan, it was the last straw. He felt that the investigative nurses' story to the newspaper was unprofessional and that it undermined the public's trust in Duke as an institution. Anlyan next replaced the Dean of Nursing with Ruby Wilson, then working in Thailand for the Rockefeller Foundation. The hospital Director of Nursing also left. Thelma Ingles went into professional exile from this country to take Ruby Wilson's place at the Rockefeller Foundation, serving its international programs with distinction for many years. The demise of Duke's collaborative NP program left Gene Stead with a bitterness that extended to women in general. He declared:

We would have to say, at least in our part of the world, nursing education is becoming a general form of education. And I would have to say that we have a very attractive student body. They are fun to talk to and to work with. They generally marry well and they live well. But they are no longer a very active force in the health field. And, because of the amount of time which is devoted to general education in the course of the relatively half-life of active work in the field, we do not any longer look upon the nurse as a primary person allied with the physician who is going to give care in the health field.

Subsequently, Stead forbade admission of either nurses or women into the first PA program.<sup>2,3</sup>

Soon after and with Anlyan's support, Stead decided to educate corpsmen returning from Vietnam, already extensively and expensively trained, to become physician assistants. Dr. Anlyan retells that at about the same time, he found himself at a medical conference dinner sitting next to the Undersecretary of the Navy to whom Anlyan remarked that 30,000 trained experienced corpsmen returning from Vietnam should be put to use in a parallel capacity in civilian life. The Navy Undersecretary expressed doubt about Anlyan's numbers, but sought him out the next day to say that Anlyan was indeed correct and promised upon return to Washington, D.C., to promote Anlyan's idea. The rest is history. Stead's PA program was successfully launched in 1964, establishing Duke's medical model for massive federal funding of an additional 57 PA programs.

It took the NLN and ANA at least another decade to endorse a NP concept, then only to limit its functions to "care" versus "cure"—the physician's realm. However, Anlyan has not been a leader who gives up easily. Ten years ago, as Chair of the Health Committee of the Duke Endowment Fund, he sponsored a one-day invitational symposium about M.D./Nurse collaboration for doctors and nurses from North Carolina. Fortuitously, a bad ice storm imprisoned the participants for an additional several days, thereby nudging continuing dialogue about the need for greater collaboration in the face of increasing demands for access to primary care and cost control.

## Conclusion

It is not too bold to say that the PA profession owes its very existence to nursing leadership in the 1950s and 1960s. If instead of being foiled, the Duke Masters Nurse Practitioner program had succeeded as collaboration between medicine and nursing, we may never have had the PA profession as we know it today. By dint of his unflinching support of Dr. Eugene Stead's efforts throughout, Dr. William Anylan deserves a prominent place in the pantheon of early PA leaders.

References:

1. Ingles, Thelma Marguerite. Care From the Heart: Memoirs of the Remarkable Woman and Pioneering Nurse Who Helped Inspire to Duke University Physician Assistant Program and Nursing Around the World. La Mesa, CA: BTW Publishing. 2012. 93-128.
2. Private Communication with William Anylan, M.D.
3. Holt, Natalie F. "Confusion's Masterpiece: The Development of the Physician Assistant Profession." Bulletin: History of Medicine. 72 (2) 1998. 246-278

Acknowledgement:

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For Additional Information about Dr. William Anylan see:

- Biography at <http://www.pahx.org/anlyan-william-g>
- Photograph of Certificate Signing Ceremony 1967 at <http://pahx.org/node/351?fid=533>
- Anylan letter establishing Ad Hoc Committee to investigate training of Physician Assistants at Duke University, 1966 at <http://medspace.mc.duke.edu/physicians-assistant-program-ad-hoc-committee-correspondence-anlyan-committee-members>

For Additional Information about Thelma Ingles and the Advanced Clinical Nursing Program at Duke University see:

- Biography at <http://www.pahx.org/ingles-thelma-m>
- Online Article titled "Nurse Thelma Ingles and the first MSN in Advanced Practice Clinical Nursing" at <http://nursinghistory.appstate.edu/dukes-msn-advanced-clinical-nursing-practice>