

Robert P. Christopher, M. D.
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
818 Island Club Sq.
Vero Beach, FL, 32963-5505
Phone: 772-492-0538
E-mail: drobobchris1@bellsouth.net

October 19, 2006

Mrs. Lorry Davis
Southern Society of PM&R
P.O. Box 330298
Atlantic Beach, FL, 32233-0298

Dear Lorry:

I have reviewed the 65 page document sent to the Southern Society by Dr. Bill Fleming. For the most part, it is accurate and is in accord with my recollections but there are a few errors and some areas where I can add or clarify some of the statements made in the document. Dr. Fleming and I have been close personal friends for nearly 40 years. He is several years older than I am and is certainly one of the pioneers in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in the south and particularly in Florida and Alabama. When I think of the obstacles that people like Bill had to overcome just to practice good Rehabilitation Medicine, I am in awe of people like him and the other early pioneers in the field. As you know, medical practitioners are slow to accept change and for a physiatrist to come into a community and propose to take a holistic approach to treatment and want to also improve a person's lifestyle was revolutionary in the 40's, 50's and even into the early 60's. Of course, Dr. Fleming came to Florida to head the PM&R Dept. at the VA Medical Center in Coral Gables but like most of our early pioneers, he did not confine himself to the narrow walls of the VA Hospital. He worked with the few practitioners of our specialty in the Miami area to spread the principles and practice of Rehabilitation Medicine throughout the medical community thus paving the way for doctors who came after him. As you know, he ran a most successful residency program in the specialty at the VA Hospital for many years and trained a number of physiatrists who are still in practice around the state. At that time, it was the only training program in PM&R in Florida. I feel we should all be grateful to Dr. Fleming for sharing these memories with us and I hope that publishing them to our members of both the Florida and Southern Societies will help to give especially our younger members a sense of the contribution these early practitioners of the specialty have made to the success and growing recognition of our specialty by the medical community and the public in general which we enjoy today.

In the attached pages, I have commented on the various items in his hand written notes. Following this, I have made a few comments on the various letters he included. Please feel free to use any and/or all of my comments as you see fit. Please let me know if you have questions. Best regards to you and Robby.

Sincerely,

Robert P. Christopher, M.D.

Robert P. Christopher, M.D.

COMMENTS ON THE HISTORY OF THE SPECIALTY OF PM&R AND THE
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSIATRY IN FLORIDA BY
WILLIAM C. FLEMING, M.D.

BY ROBERT P. CHRISTOPHER, M.D.

Page 1: There is really no confusion about Mrs. Materson. Dr. Materson and I served together for several years on the Board of Governors of the American Academy of PM&R and I got to know his wife, Rosa, quite well at a number of social events of the Academy. She had trained in a combined OT/PT program in Puerto Rico and could function in either capacity. She apparently worked at the Coral Gables VA as an OT but after the Matersons moved to Houston, she worked only as a PT. Dr. Materson was President of the American Academy of PM&R in 1986-87 during which time I served as Secretary of the Academy. I served as Academy President in 1993-94. Dr. Materson, who attended Medical School at the University of Miami did his PM&R Residency training at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco which is a US Army hospital. This Florida educated doctor has made monumental contributions to the advancement of our specialty. He would have completed his training in Florida if Dr. Fleming's residency program had been approved at that time. After practicing in Houston for several years and teaching at Baylor Medical School, Dr. Materson went to Washington, D.C. to become the founding Medical Director of the National Rehabilitation Hospital. He now resides back in the Houston area.

Page 4: In Dr. Krusen's first residency, there were four physicians; the two named by Dr. Fleming and Drs. Gordon Martin and Arthur Watkins. Drs. Elkins and Martin remained at Mayo Clinic after completing their training. Dr. Elkins became the first Executive Secretary of the American Board of PM&R when it was established in 1947 and recognized by the Liaison Committee for Medical Specialties which later became the American Board of Medical Specialties. People who think that our specialty is relatively young are mistaken. As you can see, our Board is 59 years old. Dr. Elkins served in that capacity for many years and was replaced by Dr. Martin as Secretary in 1977. Dr. Bennett left Rochester, Minnesota to become Medical Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation which was then operated by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (March of Dimes) which was founded by President Franklin Roosevelt. Dr. Bennett was one of the founding members of the American Board of PM&R and was its first Chairman. He received Board Certificate number one. Dr. Watkins left Rochester to become a Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School. He wrote one of the early PM&R textbooks on the use of electrotherapy in PM&R.

During World War II, Dr. Howard Rusk, an internist from St. Louis was serving in the Army Air Force Medical Corps at Wilfred Hall Medical Center in San Antonio with the rank of Major. He was assigned to serve as Medical Director of the Air Force's newly established rehabilitation unit at that hospital. After the war, he returned to St. Louis and opened a medical practice with emphasis on rehabilitation. He wrote extensively on the importance of the team approach in rehabilitation and stressed that the doctor's responsibility does not end when the patient is discharged from the hospital but only when that person is fully integrated back into his family, his job and his community. He was a great champion of holistic medicine, that is, you do not treat the patient's disability,

you treat the whole person and the effects of that disability on the person, their family and those with whom they are associated. He wrote the first textbook on Rehabilitation Medicine and that was the title.

It is generally accepted that Dr. Frank Krusen was the father of Physical Medicine while Dr. Rusk was the father of Rehabilitation. Dr. Rusk was the first person ever to be given Honorary Certification by the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. He also was granted Honorary Membership in the American Academy of PM&R and was the second recipient of the Frank H. Krusen Award in 1973. This is the highest honor that the Academy confers and is given only to physicians who have made monumental contributions to the development of our specialty.

Page 6: Dr Fleming is absolutely correct in his description of the grading system for the American Board of PM&R Oral Exam in those days. When I was first asked to be a Guest Oral Examiner in 1982, I was given a sheet with that same grading system. When I was elected to the American Board of PM&R in 1987, it was proposed that we develop a more objective grading system and try to standardize the questions which the candidates were asked. It took several year but by 1995, we had standardized both the grading and the questions. I completed my second six year term on the Board in 1999.

Page 8: Dr. Nick Cherup finished his first year of PM&R residency at the Coral Gables VAH under Dr. Fleming's direction. He would have completed his training there but his wife, Nadia, was very close to her family back in Detroit and became homesick. She talked Dr. Cherup into returning to Michigan and finishing his residency training at the University of Michigan. I was a PM&R resident at the U. of M. at that time and that is when Nick and I first met. Nick and Nadia and my wife and I became close personal friends. On many occasions, he told me what a wonderful teacher and friend that Dr. Fleming was. In 1967, when I moved to the University of Tennessee and subsequently met Dr. Fleming at a regional meeting sponsored by Vocational Rehabilitation, I felt that I already knew him. We became friends immediately. Dr. Cherup stayed in the Detroit area and practiced PM&R there for many years. He loved golf and would come to Florida in the winter to play.

With regard to the development of the Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine at New York University by Dr. Rusk, there is a little more to the story. Dr. Frank Krusen told this to me himself during a period in 1962 when he served as Visiting Professor at the University of Michigan while I was a resident there. Dr. Krusen told me that I was his professional grandchild because two of the physicians who were training me in the specialty, Dr. James Rae and Dr. Leonard Bender had been trained by him at Mayo Clinic. The real impetus for the development of the NYU program came from Bernard Baruch who was a personal friend of President Franklin Roosevelt and served as one of his closest advisors. He had amassed a fortune as an investor and became a great philanthropist. Mr. Roosevelt had told him of the great benefits of spa therapy and physical therapy which the President had enjoyed during his trips to Warm Springs, Georgia. Mr. Baruch approached the President of New York University and told him he would give the University \$100,000 to develop a medical rehabilitation institute as part of the NYU Medical School. In today's dollars, that would be equal to \$2.5 million. He called Dr. Krusen and asked him to recommend a Medical Director. Dr. Krusen had met Dr. Rusk while he was serving as a consultant to the Army Air Force during the war and thought he would be perfect for the job. He gave Dr. Rusk's name to Mr. Baruch who

was able to convince Dr. Rusk to come to New York and take the job. Dr. Rusk told me himself that he gave 400 talks that first year he was a NYU. In those days, no medical insurance company paid for rehabilitation services. Needless to say, Dr. Rusk was a phenomenal fund raiser. He had a wonderful outgoing personality and remembered your name even if he saw you infrequently. In the early 70's a gentleman named Schwartz who had amassed a fortune building railroad locomotives passed away and left the Rehabilitation Institute \$25 million. Dr. Rusk said he was then able to decrease his fund raising activities.

Page 9: With regard to Dr. Henry Betts, he did serve as personal physician to Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy who had suffered a stroke. Dr. Betts lived at the Kennedy Compound in Hyannisport, Massachusetts for 9 months. During that time, he dated Pat Kennedy who later married Actor Peter Lawford and also Lynda Bird Johnson. He also became personal friends with Senator Edward Kennedy who became a great champion of disability rights and was a major sponsor of The Americans with Disabilities Act which President George H. W. Bush signed in 1992. Senator Kennedy had stated on numerous occasions that his interest in the rights of people with disabilities came from two sources; one was the fact that his sister, Rosemary, was born with a disability and the second was his close friendship with Dr. Betts who taught him a great deal regarding this issue. When Dr. Betts agreed to move to Chicago to expand the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Senator Kennedy introduced him to Senator Charles Percy who was a Senator from Illinois. Although they were in different political parties, Senators Percy and Kennedy were close personal friends. Senator Percy had previously served as CEO of Bell and Howell Camera Company and knew most of the major corporate executives in the Chicago area. He "opened many doors" for Dr. Betts and enabled him to tap the funds of a number of corporate charitable foundations. Dr. Betts told me that when the new seventeen story Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago building was constructed on the Northwestern University Medical School campus in the early 80's, the price tag was \$26 million. Dr. Betts told me that only \$1 million of that total was federal dollars. The other \$25 million were all private donations from individuals and foundations in the Chicago area. Since 1991, The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago has been ranked number one in the annual rankings of the best rehabilitation hospitals in America by US News and World Report.

Comments on the letters:

1. With regard to the letter of December 21, 1966 to Dr. Claude Garrett in New Orleans, Dr. Fleming has a note at the bottom that this is one of the early letters regarding SSPMR activities. That is not correct. The SSPMR was not founded until 1967. The letter refers to a program sponsored by the PM&R Section of the Southern Medical Association which was to meet in Miami in the fall of 1967. I know that to be true because the Doctors copied on the letter, Dr. Gregg from Duke, Dr. Petersen who was then at Baylor and Dr. Wolcott who was then at the University of Missouri were never members of the SSPMR.
2. The letter to Dr. Fleming from Dr. Chyatte of September 10, 1968 is truly a very historic document in the development of the SSPMR. Dr. Chyatte along with Dr. Fleming, Dr. Jack Birdsell and myself were the founders of the SSPMR. At the meeting

in Birmingham in 1967, we asked Dr. Chyatte to send out questionnaires to all members of the American Academy of PM&R who were listed in the Academy directory as residing in any of the southeastern states. The questionnaire asked whether they would be interested in joining the Southeastern Society of PM&R and coming to an accredited annual scientific meeting. At the time, there were only about 100 physiatrists in the entire southeastern US but out of that number, 30 replied favorably. The group met for the first time at Emory University in Atlanta on Nov. 1, 1968. Dr. Chyatte served as our Secretary for the first several years with all the records of the Society being kept at his office. Dr. Chyatte, who was a juvenile diabetic, passed away from a myocardial infarction at age 43. This was a tragic loss for our specialty and for me personally because he was a close personal friend. I then became Secretary of the Society which, by then had changed its name to the Southern Society. His wife, Helen, who was a Registered Nurse, was a strong supporter of our organization and organized programs for the spouses at several of our early annual meetings.