

In memoriam:

Paul F. Nora, MD, PhD, FACS

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and Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS, former ACS Executive Director

When Paul Francis Nora, MD, PhD, FACS, died on November 22, 2009, at the age of 80, it marked the end of the second phase in a distinguished career as surgical author, teacher, administrator, and philanthropist. His early years had been devoted to establishing his surgical credentials with the customary specialty certification, followed by a fellowship at a famed private clinic, a PhD in surgery, and the editorship—at age 43—of a multi-authored textbook on the topic of operative surgery. Dr. Nora's second phase established him as a leader in the long, challenging fight against the scourge of legislation and litigation gathered under the misnamed heading of "medical malpractice."

Accomplishing these two distinctive careers from the central location of a religiously oriented, immigrant-focused hospital—albeit one with university affiliation—made his achievements especially noteworthy.

Dr. Nora was prominent for many years as a pro bono consultant on professional liability with the College, and the pinnacle of this work occurred in 2008, when he endowed the College with the Nora Institute for Surgical Patient Safety. For this, and other contributions to the College in the Fellows Leadership Society, he was named in 2008 as a Distinguished



Dr. Nora

Philanthropist of the American College of Surgeons.

A leader in patient safety

In the 1970s, the College recognized Dr. Nora as a unique resource whose ethical background and multiple talents could be allied with the College's efforts against the persistent threat of professional liability. Working actively in a hospital with a strong moral tradition, buttressed by the dominant example of his father and brothers in a busy clinical practice consistent with the ideals of the hospital's founder, Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini, it was natural that Paul Nora might come to occupy a leadership role in promoting

College programs in surgical patient safety. The early efforts of the College in hospital quality assurance matured into the Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation, which took on hospital systems as these developed, and is now known as The Joint Commission, a vast enterprise that was erected on some three decades of quality assurance under solitary College management, before assuming its multiple institutional character. Dr. Nora served as a College representative on The Joint Commission as a skilled commissioner during a critical phase in the organization's history.

Academic excellence

Born in Chicago, IL, to a strong tradition of family medical service, Dr. Nora graduated in 1952 from Loyola University's Stritch School of Medicine, in Chicago, IL. An internship at Cook County Hospital, Chicago, IL, was followed by service as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, from 1952 to 1955. Thereafter, he completed a general surgical residency at Cook County Hospital in 1959, and spent a fellowship year at the Lahey Clinic, Boston, MA, in 1960. He added a surgical PhD at Northwestern University, Chicago, IL, in 1968, and served as assistant professor of clinical surgery from 1969 to 1972, progressing to full profes-

sorship of clinical surgery at Northwestern in 1978.

Dr. Nora established a successful surgical residency program at Columbus-Cabrini Hospital, and edited the first edition of his textbook, *Operative Surgery*, in 1972, with 72 collaborating surgeons. A second edition was published in 1980, and a third was published in 1990.

The second phase

Dr. Nora's home hospital base was diminishing gradually under the financial pressures that have been attacking all independent health care facilities, and his personal clinical surgical activities were winding down as he focused on administrative work with the College. The progressive advancement of his wife's malignant disease and its therapy were based in California, and led Dr. Nora to gradually divide his time between the West Coast and the Midwest—where the second phase of his professional career was evolving.

In 1991, he published *Professional Liability/Risk Management, A Manual for Surgeons*. A second edition was published in 1997, at a time when the field was in the process of rapid development, with a specific focus on patient safety. A strong stimulus to enhanced professional and lay interest in patient safety occurred with the November 1999 publication of a report by the Institute of Medicine entitled *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. This alarming estimate of deaths, as a result of preventable errors, served to galvanize public and professional attention, and intensified a widespread plan for education



Dr. Nora accepting the Distinguished Philanthropist Award in 2008.

and prevention of patient injury at the hands of physicians in training and in clinical practice.

In 2004, the College published *Surgical Patient Safety: Essential Information for Surgeons in Today's Environment*, edited by Barry M. Manuel, MD, FACS, and Dr. Nora. In 15 chapters covering a wide range of topics from human factors to institutional organization, as well as contentious issues such as resident duty hours and error detection, the authors provide a valuable handbook calculated to increase patient safety by reducing error at every level of the patient encounter. In addition to co-editorship of the volume, Dr. Nora was also an author of the chapter on Accountability in Surgery, which advocates change in the "...prevalent culture of blame," replacing it with a team approach to quality control. Such an approach critiques the operative surgical experience

from the selection of surgical staff members to the details of the operation itself, as reported and analyzed with relentless objectivity.

Paul Nora left a splendid legacy in education, administration, and clinical surgical practice, before embarking on his outstanding accomplishments in quality control and surgical patient safety. With his late, beloved wife Valerie, and their five children and 10 grandchildren, complemented by 31 nephews and nieces, he provided a "great cloud of witnesses" to a life of immense achievement and quiet devotion. It was peculiarly appropriate that his final episode of illness began on the steps of his parish church as he was leaving his customary morning Mass. His work will continue in the Nora Institute for Surgical Patient Safety that Dr. Nora and his family instituted for the greater safety of innumerable future patients.