



## **Jerry M. Petty MD- Tribute to an Iconic Medical Pioneer**

On February 1, 2021, Dr. Jerry M. Petty will conclude his 53-year career as one of the most distinguished neurosurgeons in the nation, and one of the most estimable healthcare providers in the history of the Charlotte region.

Jerry Miller Petty was born on August 25, 1935, the fifth of six children to Miller and Kate Petty. He grew up in Gastonia, NC, and attended Gastonia High School (now Ashley High School) where he excelled as a student athlete. Jerry's father ran a machine shop out of the basement in their home, and he and his brothers often helped their father in his shop after school. At age 6 he took his first job outside of his home at Tony's Ice Cream Parlor, swatting flies; he made 25 cents a day.

Dr. Petty attended undergraduate and Medical School at UNC-Chapel Hill. After an inauspicious start to his medical education (he ranked 66<sup>th</sup> in his class of 66 after his first examination), he quickly achieved his true academic potential and was ultimately graduated 6<sup>th</sup> in his class, in addition to being elected to the prestigious Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society.

Dr. Petty was accepted for a residency training in Plastic Surgery at Barnes Hospital in St Louis (Washington University) and started his internship in 1960. The following year he met Audrey Anderton, a nurse anesthetist, and Jerry and Audrey married shortly thereafter. Near the end of 1961 Jerry was drafted into the military, and after serving as a physician in the Air Force for two years he determined to switch his clinical focus and pursue a career in neurological surgery. He returned to Barnes and trained under Dr. Henry Schwartz, a pioneer in neurological surgery who was a himself a trainee of Walter Dandy, one of the founding fathers of American Neurosurgery.

After residency, Dr. Petty briefly worked as a surgeon in St. Louis before moving to Charlotte North Carolina in 1968 to become the partner of Drs. William Pitts (the second practicing neurosurgeon in the state of North Carolina after Dr. Eben Alexander) and Dr. George Blanchard in what was then known as Charlotte Neurosurgical. Dr. Blanchard retired from practice shortly after Jerry's arrival due to health reasons, and that left Jerry and Dr. Pitts to provide all of the neurosurgical care in the Charlotte region. Due to Dr. Pitts' many academic board responsibilities, Dr. Petty provided a disproportionate amount of the local neurosurgical care in those early days.

Dr. Petty's long career has spanned the complete empirical evolution of what has become the most technology driven specialty in medicine. Given the ubiquity of modern imaging services such as CT and MRI scans, it is hard to imagine that just 50 years ago, no direct imaging of the brain was available. That reality necessitated Dr. Petty and his colleagues to rely primarily on detailed neurological examinations, intuition, experience, and rudimentary techniques (some of which had been in use since the 1930's, such as pneumoencephalograms (i.e., injecting air in the ventricles through the spine or skull, in order to detect brain shift, or other structural abnormalities)) to make accurate clinical diagnoses. In 1974, after becoming aware of a new form of imaging tool that would come to revolutionize medicine (Computed Tomography, or, CT), Dr. Petty successfully led a program to obtain this technology for both Charlotte Memorial Hospital (now Carolinas Medical Center) and Charlotte Neurosurgical (now the Carolina Neurosurgery and Spine Associates). Jerry's vision proved to be a catalyst for the spirit of innovation that has become a defining characteristic our local medical community, and has allowed for thousands of patients in this region over the last several decades to access the most advanced care available.

Dr. Petty has always been an avid athlete, and was a competitive squash and handball player for many years. He successfully completed 23 marathons, including New York, Boston, Grandfather Mountain, Charlotte, and the Marine Corps. Because of his passion for athletics, Dr. Petty has been a leader in promoting health and well-being in professional sports. He has served as the principal Medical Consultant for NASCAR since the 1970's. He was the first Neurosurgical Consultant to the Carolina Panthers (1995-2013). Since 2013, has been an Unaffiliated Neurological Consultant, serving at most Panthers games under the commission of the National Football league. Dr. Petty is a voracious reader and consumes books at a rate of over one per week on an eclectic range of subjects that reflect his expansive intellectual interests, innate curiosity, wit, empathy, and benevolence, including philosophy, history, science, art, and theology.

Over a career that has now lasted greater than two generations, Jerry has developed and secured a well-earned reputation as a skilled diagnostician, technically gifted surgeon, consummate professional, tireless advocate for underserved healthcare populations, and a quiet but forceful advocate for fairness, perspective and reason. His equanimity, compassion, genuine humility, and commitment to principle have endeared him to his colleagues and patients alike. His unique leadership *by example* and tireless dedication to excellence laid the foundation for what has become the largest neurosurgery group in the nation. Perhaps most importantly, the intellectual and ethical framework that characterized Dr. Petty's life and work gave rise to a shared, virtuous medical culture that built and now sustains the essential trust of CNSA's patients, our institutional partners, our referring doctors, and our community writ large.

For his outstanding contributions in multiple spheres of life, Jerry has received numerous awards, including the Southern Neurosurgical Society Distinguished Practitioner Award (2002) and the Bill France NASCAR Award of Excellence (2006).

Jerry and Audrey Petty were married for 59 Years-Audrey passed away in April 2020. Jerry and Audrey had four children; all four are working or have worked in healthcare, a testimony to the profound inspiration of their parents. Dr. Petty has 11 adoring grandchildren.

In summary, Jerry Petty is the archetypal "doctor's doctor". His contributions as a father, friend, husband, surgeon, mentor and medical visionary over the last almost 60 years have been immense. His life and work have positively impacted the lives of thousands of individuals. His primary legacies are a wonderful family, legions of friends and admirers, thousands of grateful patients, and a vital clinical

practice that will continue to advance neurosurgical science, education, values and health for generations to come. Jerry is and will remain an inspiration to all who have been fortunate enough to have known and be influenced by him. His daily presence within our medical community will be sorely missed.

In celebrating Jerry's life and career, we not only pay tribute to an individual, but also publically affirm what *really* matters in life-character, principled behavior, and a profound respect for our fellow human beings. The latter attribute is particularly relevant in our current socio-political environment. In these turbulent times, it's essential for all of us to reflect on a life well-lived, and seek instruction, encouragement, and spiritual renewal from remarkable people like Jerry.

With greatest respect, gratitude and affection:

The Physicians, administrators and teammates of the Carolina Neurosurgery and Spine Associates, and an indebted, thankful community.

February 1, 2021