

Luther P Christman, 1915-2011

Luther Christman, pioneer for Men in Nursing passes:

June 7, 2011 in Nashville, TN

Luther Parmalee Christman, nurse and educator, was among the most strident advocates for the unification of service and education for nursing in University health systems. As Dean of the Nursing School at Vanderbilt University, Christman was also the Director of Nursing at Vanderbilt Hospital from 1967 until he left for Chicago and the Rush Presbyterian St. Lukes Hospital in 1972 to build what has become the "Rush Model". Until his retirement in 1987, Christman, as Vice President for Nursing Affairs and Dean of the College of Nursing, assembled a system of patient-centered nursing care that employed well educated nurses many of whom also taught in the Rush University school of nursing as teacher-practitioners. His efforts and those of nurses Rozella Schlotfeldt (Cleveland) and Loretta Ford (Rochester) countered the trend in 1970s professional education to separate hospital service from academic nursing. The continued reluctance to unify these professional functions is based on the long time domination of schools of nursing by hospitals. The Rush System was highly regarded internationally and attracted a steady stream of visitors to observe its workings. Dr. Christman was the author of numerous papers and published articles about patient care and education for the nursing profession. Luther Christman died at Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville, TN on June 7, 2011 of pneumonia.



Obituary

Luther Parmalee Christman was born in 1915 to Elmer and Elizabeth (Barnicot) Christman. His father was a coal miner and his mother had been a textile worker. Luther was the oldest of the four Christman children who survived to adulthood. He was predeceased by his siblings, Eleanor, Lois and Elmer. Luther's spouse of 64 years, Mrs. Dorothy Mary Christman, an incorrigible mother, hospital volunteer and nursery woman, died in 2003. Dr. Christman is survived by daughters Judith Kinney (WI) and Lillian Christman (VA), son Gary of Chapel Hill, TN, and several grandchildren.

About Luther Christman

Luther P. Christman began his career in nursing in 1936 as a student in the school for men at the Institute of Pennsylvania, the Psychiatric component of the Pennsylvania Hospital. The depression necessitated his seeking an opportunity for study in a school that provided, room, board and a small stipend. Dorothy Black, his high school sweetheart from Summit Hill, PA entered the Methodist Hospital nursing school in Philadelphia and he followed. They were married after both finished their respective courses of study for nursing. At the outset of WWII, Christman tried to enlist in the Army Nurse Corps but was rebuffed because of his gender. He undertook an unsuccessful, public, years long campaign to obtain a commission all the while serving as a Pharmacist's Mate in the United States Marine Service.

Christman taught nursing in Camden, NJ while studying in night school at Temple University. He assumed leadership positions in psychiatric nursing in South Dakota and Michigan and completed his PhD at Michigan State University in 1965 and served as a Research Associate at the University of Michigan with Basil Georgopolis, a hospital sociologist. Christman was a member of the Institute of Medicine, National Academies of Science, a recipient of the American Nurses Association Jessie M. Scott Award and inductee in their Hall of Fame. He was awarded three honorary degrees, was a member of the American Academy of Nursing and their 1995 Living Legend recipient. Sigma Theta Tau, the honorary society for nurses gave Christman the initial Edith Moore Copeland Founders Award for Creativity. The American Nurses Association also named an award given to men in the profession for him.



While Dean and Director of Nursing at Vanderbilt, Christman ran for the presidency of the American Nurses Association at the 1968 Dallas, TX meeting. His defeat in that election brought with it a sense of unfairness towards men in nursing, an issue he fought for the rest of his long professional career. The National Male Nurse Association named their coveted Award for him and first gave it to Gerald Ford when he was President of the United States. Re-named the American Assembly for Men in Nursing, Christman continued as its Chairman until his death.