

Tributes to Dale Coln, MD, upon his retirement

In August 2005, Dale Coln, MD, retired from his position as medical director of pediatric surgery at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas after 18 years of service (Figure). Dr. Coln has been recognized throughout his career for his compassionate care of children and their families. He was awarded the American Academy of Pediatrics Special Achievement Award in 2001; was named “Best Doctor for Your Kids” by *D Magazine* for 4 years; and received the distinguished service award from Children’s Medical Center of Dallas in 2002. Here, some friends from Baylor and the Dallas medical community offer their tributes.

William Dammert, MD

I have known Dale for over 30 years, and even though we have been in competing practices, we’ve had a wonderful, collegial, friendly relationship. He is a wonderful human being, and my partners and I have always respected his integrity, both as a person and as a pediatric surgeon. It has been an honor for me to practice in the same city as Dale, and I wish him and Shirley happiness and health during their retirement.

Ronald C. Jones, MD

Dale was born in Dallas and grew up in Fort Worth, where his father worked for Williamson-Dickey Manufacturing Company, which made uniforms and work clothes. His father subsequently went into business for himself and had two factories, one in Hico, Texas, and one in Graham, Texas. Dale’s mother, who was a faithful Cub Scout den mother for 5 years, was not only a housewife, rearing Dale and his brother, who now lives in Kentucky; she also helped her husband in the business after her sons were adults.

I first met Dale when he came to Parkland Memorial Hospital to do a National Institutes of Health research fellowship in fluids and electrolytes with Dr. Tom Shires. He had just finished an internship in internal medicine at Jefferson Davis Hospital in Houston in 1962 following graduation from Baylor University College of Medicine. I was a third-year general surgery resident. During that year of research, he and Dr. Shires demonstrated that hemorrhagic shock leads to a shift of fluids into a third space, and the resulting extracellular fluid deficit can be managed with the administration of a balanced salt solution (Ringers lactate) rather than the administration of blood alone. This study, presented to the Surgical Forum of the American College of Surgeons in 1963, was a significant contribution to surgery and has become the standard of care, especially in the resuscitation of trauma patients.



Figure. Dr. Dale Coln in the operating room.

Following the fellowship, Dr. Coln completed 4 additional years of general surgery training at Parkland Memorial Hospital.

Following a general surgery residency, Dale served 2 years in the US Public Health Service as chief of surgery at the Alaska Native Hospital in Mt. Edgecumbe prior to joining the full-time surgery faculty in 1969.

At the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, he had a strong interest in pediatric surgery. There were no boards in pediatric surgery in 1970. With support from Dr. Shires, he took a 1-year fellowship at the University of Cape Town in South Africa in 1971 and returned to Parkland to direct the pediatric surgery service.

In 1973, when Dr. Shires moved to the University of Washington in Seattle with many of the full-time faculty, I was the first general surgeon to decide to remain in Dallas. Within 24 to 36 hours, Dr. Coln called me and said he would stay with me, and for several months we were the only general surgeons committed to holding the department together. This was an awesome adventure, considering we staffed Parkland Hospital and the Veterans Administration Hospital in Dallas. Nevertheless, over the next several months, four additional general surgeons agreed to stay, and six of us kept the department of general surgery going. Dale took on the responsibility for not only pediatric surgery but also for helping with adult vascular surgery at the Veterans Hospital. He also performed kidney transplants with the urology team at Parkland.

With the support of Dr. Bill Fry, chairman of surgery at Southwestern in 1978, Dr. Coln did a 6-month fellowship in pediatric surgery at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles to qualify for the pediatric surgery board, which was founded in 1974. He was a few months shy of qualifying for the board without a fellowship under the grandfather clause. Dale would leave Dallas at 6:30 AM each Monday morning en route to Los Angeles and return from Los Angeles late Friday evening to be with his family for the weekends. He became board certified in 1980.

As director of pediatric surgery at Parkland Memorial Hospital, Dr. Coln took care of many children with a variety of injuries. He saw the need for a pediatric trauma unit. With the support of Parkland administration and funding from the Crystal Charity Ball, a pediatric trauma unit was opened in 1984. The influx of injured children came rapidly from the North Texas area to the only freestanding pediatric trauma unit in the country. This consolidated pediatric care of both indigent and private patients at Children's Medical Center and led to the unit's American College of Surgeons Level I designation in 2005. The unit now treats 3000 patients a year.

In addition to the large trauma service, he, Dr. Jack Chang, and Dr. Walter Andrews cared for the large number of newborns needing surgery at Parkland Memorial Hospital. Dr. Andrews and Dr. Chang were instrumental in starting the pediatric liver transplant service at Children's Medical Center.

When I came to Baylor in July 1987, Dr. Coln independently decided to come to Baylor as well and establish his practice in pediatric surgery. He was the first director of the Division of Pediatric Surgery at Baylor University Medical Center. Dale was immediately well liked by the Baylor general surgery residents and always contributed significantly to their training, not only at Baylor but also on their rotations at Children's Medical Center, where he also practiced.

Everyone who has known Dr. Coln knows of his even temperament and his willingness to help others. He and Shirley have made seven missionary trips to Guatemala with an organization called HELPS International. He is a member of the Northwest Bible Church and taught Sunday School at Wilshire Baptist Church on Abrams Road for 4 years.

Dale has always been at the forefront of the practice of pediatric surgery and during the last 2 to 3 years has popularized the Nuss procedure for pectus excavatum, a congenital concavity deformity of the front of the chest. Dale met Dr. Donald Nuss at the Red Cross Hospital in 1972 when he was a pediatric fellow in Cape Town. Dr. Nuss, a South African, had trained at the Mayo Clinic and subsequently returned to the United States. Dr. Coln has performed this procedure in 123 children. He has also performed this procedure in adults and has treated more adults with this procedure than any other surgeon in the United States. He will soon publish a paper demonstrating for the first time that an echocardiogram in adults can show the need for relief of cardiac compression from the pectus excavatum as well as mitral valve prolapse.

Dr. Coln served as president of the Texas Pediatric Society in 2000. This society, a chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, is older than the academy itself. He is the only surgeon to serve as president of one of the state chapters. Dr. Coln

currently serves as a governor's appointee to the Texas Office for Prevention of Developmental Disabilities.

Dale and his wife have five children: Sara and Ruth Anna live in the Dallas area; Eric is a practicing pediatric surgeon in St. Louis; Lois Ruth lives in Waco, Texas; and Mary Beth resides in Memphis, Tennessee.

Dale's wife, Shirley Kindberg, is a pediatrician who recently retired from practicing neonatology. She and Dale were classmates at Baylor College of Medicine and were married in May 1962. Upon Dale's retirement, they plan to spend more time with their children and 14 grandchildren. He and Shirley plan to remain in Dallas, where they have numerous friends. We thank Dr. Coln for his many contributions to caring for children, particularly those sustaining trauma, and for contributing to the literature, giving his time to numerous organizations, and being a fine surgeon, friend, and educator.

Lynne Roffino, RN

Many years ago, while I was a nursing student, I came to Baylor to visit a neighbor child recovering from surgery with Dr. Coln. I stepped off the elevator into the most charming place. It was truly a wonderland: an elevator was painted to resemble a train, and every room looked like a little house. I remember thinking at that moment that this was where I wanted to work once I graduated.

In January 2001, I finally came to Baylor. That charming unit had been reborn as a women's unit with a 4-bed pediatric day surgery unit tucked away at one end of a long hallway. Three nurses were hired, and shortly afterwards, the unit went to a 24/7 schedule. We took turns taking the deep-night shifts until new nurses could be hired. One night, about 3:00 AM, my patient was having increased pain, and I had to call the surgeon. I will never forget the call, because after giving me the order for more pain medicine, Dr. Coln thanked me for calling him. You could have knocked me over with a feather. Over the next couple of years, I saw things I will treasure all my life. At the least sign of trouble, Dr. Coln would be at the bedside regardless of the hour. I never heard a harsh word from him. He would appear with a reassuring look on his face for the patient and always thanked the nurse for letting him know he was needed.

It will be so hard to see Dr. Coln retire. He is one of a handful of dedicated surgeons who have championed pediatrics at Baylor and have distinguished Baylor as a premier and peerless standard for pediatric surgeons to follow. We Baylor pediatric nurses know how fortunate we are to have served the patients of these physicians. But Dr. Coln is the nearest and dearest to our hearts.

One day Dr. Coln performed surgery in the wee hours at Baylor, then had several surgeries at Children's, and then came back to Baylor to make rounds, and then had to take late-night calls for us at Baylor again. I asked him when he would find time to rest. He answered, "I'll rest in the grave." Well, I am happy to see that Dr. Kindberg has found a better way for him to rest. We will miss him terribly, but we want his family and especially the grandchildren to have more time with this man we adore. We can think of no better reward for a life so devoted to children.

Erwin Thal, MD

It is a pleasure and honor for me to reflect on Dale's outstanding career. We first met during our surgical residency in the mid 1960s. He was my chief resident when I returned from the service, and it became readily apparent that he was a master surgeon and superb mentor. His clinical judgment was mature, and he often had to dampen my enthusiasm to operate when surgery was not in the patient's best interest.

He joined the faculty at the medical school and was immediately recognized by the residents as one of the young, energetic faculty members who had all the characteristics and tools to be an outstanding surgeon. He was a consummate clinician, with a keen mind that led him to seek answers to many questions as he undertook his investigative endeavors. He has an absolute passion for improving the care of his patients as well as preventing many of the mishaps that lead to injury. He has been tenacious in his attempt to pass legislation to further protect young children.

In addition to his professional skills, Dale is one of the finest individuals I have ever had the pleasure to know. He is compassionate, loyal, frank, and above all genuine in every regard. When the chips are down, you can always count on him to give serious thought to the problem and come up with sage advice. In spite of his professional duties and accomplishments, he has always been a devoted husband and father to his five children. His life has been one of equanimity, rising to any occasion, and yet having the time to enjoy himself with a variety of interests outside of medicine. It is truly a privilege to have him as a friend and colleague.

Dale, I congratulate you on your retirement from a most distinguished career. Enjoy what lies ahead, my friend, as you so richly deserve it.

Aley Varughese, BSN, MS

I have been a nurse at Baylor, a pediatric nurse, for 24 years, and Dr. Coln has been here as long as my memory takes me. When I think back on my memories of Dr. Coln, the ones that stand out most vividly are those that relate to the less advantaged. For example, it was not unusual to see Dr. Coln pull money out of his own pocket to cover the taxi fare for a patient's family so they did not have to take their child home from the hospital on a bus. Another common sight was to see Dr. Coln escort a child to the unit from his office and then take the parent to admitting because English was not understood and the family was unable to read the signs.

We were all equal in Dr. Coln's eyes—nurses, techs, secretaries, and housekeepers—and he made each of us feel as if we were held in great esteem. To this day, if he spots us at lunch in the cafeteria, he will come over and ask to join us.

Dr. Coln is a softie at heart, and we all knew it. It was common knowledge that if we had Girl Scout cookies to sell, he would always buy plenty, but they never made it home with him. Instead, he would give them away to the staff.

My children grew up hearing stories about Dr. Coln. In my eyes, he is the perfect example of a true Christian.

Richard L. Wasserman, MD, PhD

I have had the privilege of working with Dr. Dale Coln for over 25 years, and I appreciate the opportunity to add my comments to this tribute.

My first contact with Dale was as a third-year surgery student at Children's Medical Center. Although I was at the bottom of the totem pole behind rotating interns and at least two residents, Dr. Coln always included me in discussions on rounds. He knew that I wasn't going to be a surgeon but made me feel like part of the team. He taught me how to think about surgical problems in children, lessons that have served me well over the years. This was also my first exposure to Dr. Coln's compassionate way with sick children and their parents. When Dr. Coln learned that I was to be a pediatric resident at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, he gave me a volume entitled *Visible and Palpable Lesions in Children* by Dr. C. Everett Koop, then chief of surgery in Philadelphia and later surgeon general—a gift that I have always treasured.

Two clinical anecdotes capture the 20 years that Dale and I have shared patients. Not long after I came to Baylor, I admitted a child in the middle of the night with the sudden onset of severe abdominal pain. She had primary immunodeficiency and was quite sick. Histoplasma were easily visible on the complete blood count taken upon her admission. Clearly, she had a perforated bowel but was very unstable. Dale met me in the pediatric intensive care unit in the early morning hours. Despite the child's very high surgical risk, Dale was able to convey a sense of calm reassurance to her parents that helped us all through that night. His careful attention and way with this child played a key role in her recovery. At the other end of the spectrum were the anxious parents of a child with a common, simple surgical problem. Dale gave this family the same level of calm, reassuring attention. It has always been a pleasure to work with him on a case, however complex or straightforward.

I am honored to have been asked to participate in this tribute to an excellent physician and a fine gentleman. It has been a privilege to have been Dale's colleague and friend.

Terri Windsor, RN, CMSRN

The nurses on 16 Roberts have observed Dr. Coln to be a very patient, supportive, and compassionate physician, with not only his patients and their families but also with the staff. It would not be unusual to see Dr. Coln round on his patients several times a day, every day, always making himself easily accessible. There has not been a time when Dr. Coln did not graciously thank the nurses for caring for his patients. How rewarding it has been to work with him!