



Biography of Mary Burnett, DO, FACGP/FACOFP distinguished

Dr. Mary McClellan Burnett, D.O., FACOFP distinguished, was the first female to serve as President of the American College of General Practitioners in Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery (known as the ACGP and later evolved to the ACOFP) from 1972 to 1973. She served the ACGP/ACOFP tirelessly, selflessly and with a love of Osteopathic Family Medicine that has rarely been matched. She served and led the ACOFP and the profession for nearly 50 years.

After attending the University of Colorado (Boulder, Colorado) from 1942-1945, Mary finished her undergraduate degree at the University of Iowa in 1946. She then entered the Kansas City College of Osteopathic Medicine and graduated in 1949. Her internship, from 1949-1950, was served at Osteopathic Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri. Afterwards, she moved back to Colorado to practice medicine.

In 1967 Dr. Mary was active in the leadership of the national ACGP and helped found the ACGP Colorado state chapter, serving as its President. In 1968 she received her ACGP Fellow designation. Soon after that, she decided to move to Dallas, Texas in 1969 and then married Dr. John Henry Burnett, D.O. in 1970. In Dallas they both became increasingly involved in national leadership. Husband, John Burnett was also a President of the ACGP from 1967 to 1968. Together the Burnett's were instrumental in establishing the national general practice residency program and eventual AOA certification for the ACGP in 1972. Dr. Mary Burnett was a founding member of the American Board of Osteopathic Family Practice in 1972. She served on that board for 25 years. During her tenure she was instrumental in implementing the E.R. Squibb Student Preceptorship Program.

Personally, Dr. Burnett always strived to be the best at everything she did. While on the ACGP Executive Board, She worked hard with other icons of the College such as fellow Dallas-ites T. Robert Sharp, D.O., and Robert Haman, D.O., fellow Texan Royce Keilers, D.O. and the perennial John Sevastos, D.O. She was fully engaged there in the formative days when many thought it was ludicrous that general practitioners could educate themselves to a higher level and "specialize" in what we now call Family Practice. The fight was long and hard.

Battles within the AOA were being fought constantly, most of them with great intensity, and sometimes great anger. Tensions were felt across the profession as Osteopathic specialty colleges again and again blocked recognition and certification of a "specialty" college for general practitioners. It was in this hostile environment that Mary Burnett found herself emerged in, however, it was an environment for which she was uniquely suited. Mary was a quiet listener but a ferocious fighter on the side of what was right. She was exceptionally bright and leveraged a motherly demeanor to command respect and elicit a gentler discussion during which many rock hard opinions softened. As well, she had a powerful ally in her husband John Burnett, D.O., also a general practitioner. John fought intensely for the College as well. After his ACGP presidency (1968), John moved up the power chain in the AOA and became the President of the AOA as well in 1985.

As was the fashion and as were the times, Mary McClellan Burnett, D.O. operated as a tiny minority in a man-dominated profession. The fact that she succeeded was in itself an accomplishment; the fact that she excelled is testimony to her gifts, abilities, demeanor and hard work. Her quiet strength was most evident when she would endure all of the boisterous people in a meeting and listen to all the loud opinions expressed then gently and logically make sense of it in just a few quiet words, changing minds as she did. She spoke tersely, wisely and with kindness; she never wasted an opinion.

Dr. Mary Burnett's accomplishments are too vast to list fully. She participated in the very first certification process created by the American Board of Osteopathic Family Practice; she holds certificate #9. She re-certified in September of 1994. She was a cofounder and a Board member of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine and of the ACOFP Learning Center, named The Burnett Learning Center in honor of Dr. and Dr. Burnett.

As a long standing member of the Texas Delegation to the AOA House of Delegates she eventually served as a Trustee of the American Osteopathic Association Board in the 1990's. Unknown to most, Dr. Burnett was offered the opportunity to start the final path to the presidency of the AOA. Had she accepted, she would have become the very first female president of AOA (in addition to having been the first female president of the ACGP/ACOFP). Instead, she chose to let other leaders move forward.

Additionally, Dr. Burnett served on the American Osteopathic Foundation (AOF). Her other accolades include a Founders Medal from the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (1984); the Phillips Medal of Public Service from The Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine (1994); The AOA Distinguished Service Certificate (1995); The Texas Distinguished Service Award (1997); presenter of the AOA House of Delegates' annual Andrew Taylor Still Memorial Lecturer; and recipient of the AOA Presidential Citation (2003). She served for many years as a member of the ACOFP Awards Committee and as the Grand Marshal for the Fellows Processional for over thirty years.

Dr. Mary's first love was always the ACOFP. She worked tirelessly on committee after committee. For those 40 plus years she never slowed down. Even after a major stroke Dr. Burnett could be found up and down the convention hallways soliciting members for the ACOFP, asking other members why they were not Fellows yet, and inspiring young physicians and students to be the best they could be: Osteopathic Family Physicians. She was an inspiration to women and men alike, her students, other physicians and her patients. Mary was a role model for generations of leaders of the profession. Mary Burnett, D.O., FACOFP dist., was a gift to Osteopathic Family Physicians. As a quintessential Osteopathic Family Physician, she truly lived each day as an example of what an Osteopathic physician should be.