

In Memoriam:

Ali Massumi, MD

(1945–2015)

Dr. Ali Massumi died on 13 March 2015, surrounded by his family at Baylor–St. Luke’s Medical Center Hospital in Houston, where he had pioneered the development of clinical electrophysiology (EP) therapy during a dedicated career of nearly 35 years.

Born in Iran, Ali Massumi earned his medical degree from the Tehran University School of Medicine in 1971 and then served in the Iranian Navy from 1971 through 1973. He began his training in internal medicine at the Millard Fillmore Hospital in Buffalo, New York. In 1977, he came to the Texas Heart Institute and St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital (THI-SLEH), where he trained in cardiovascular medicine through 1979. He also spent several months in the Electrophysiology and Arrhythmia Surgical Program at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

Dr. Massumi was the pioneer in cardiovascular EP for the Texas Medical Center, and specifically—in the early 1980s—for THI-SLEH. In this role, he contributed to the development of new devices and interventions, and he began THI’s effort to train cardiologists to be EP physicians in the recognition and treatment of cardiac arrhythmias and conduction disturbances, and in the prevention of sudden cardiac death. In Dr. Denton Cooley’s words, “Ali Massumi was the ‘birth mother’ of electrophysiology at THI-SLEH.”

Dr. Massumi and his team trained a large number of cardiac electrophysiologists for the world, while at the same time building a remarkable team of clinical electrophysiologists for THI-SLEH. He and his team contributed to the evolution of the EP field as it moved from the primary treatment of arrhythmias with medications and surgical techniques, to the current EP world of consistently more effective and relatively less invasive catheters for ablation, pacemaking, and defibrillation.

In the EP laboratory at our institution, Dr. Massumi was the master conductor and operator: when one of his younger colleagues was unable to ablate an arrhythmia, he would often say, “Let the old man try,” or “Let’s see if ‘Golden Fingers’ can still do it.” Almost invariably, he did successfully ablate what others could not, teaching (in the process) his team, students, and medical visitors. If he could not ablate an arrhythmia, we believed that it could not be done.

It was in fact as a teacher that Dr. Massumi seemed happiest as he helped others learn—in the EP lab, at the bedside, and at the local, national, and international conferences that he often directed. He won the annual THI Outstanding Teacher Award so many times that his winning was regarded as a natural occurrence.

Even in the most demanding clinical situations, he was always calm and polite, with a bright optimism, a smile on his face, and words to encourage others. Dr. Massumi



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never complained. Instead, he worked in the EP labs to improve opportunities to help patients who had severe cardiac electrophysiologic problems.

In the new heart hospital that we shall build within the Texas Medical Center, the EP labs will be called the “Ali Massumi, MD, Electrophysiology Laboratories for the Treatment of Cardiac Arrhythmias and Prevention of Sudden Death.”

On 18 March 2015, at a memorial service for Dr. Massumi in the atrium of the Texas Heart Institute, there was a standing-room-only crowd of present and former students, grateful patients, colleagues, and supporters, all of whom were there to give him very special acknowledgment of their respect, admiration, and affection.

Dr. Ali Massumi was an extraordinary man, and we miss him greatly. He will be missed by all who work to prevent cardiac arrhythmias and sudden death.

*James T. Willerson, MD,
President, Texas Heart Institute; and
Editor-in-Chief,
Texas Heart Institute Journal;*

*Denton A. Cooley, MD,
Former Surgeon-in-Chief,
Texas Heart Institute; and
President Emeritus,
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*Abdi Rasekh, MD,
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*Robert J. Hall, MD,
Former Medical Director, Texas Heart Institute;
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