

In Memoriam:

Denton A. Cooley, MD

(1920–2016)

Strange is our situation here on Earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know, that man is here for the sake of other men—above all those upon whose smiles and well-being our own happiness depends.

— Albert Einstein

Einstein must have had Denton A. Cooley in mind when he wrote that.

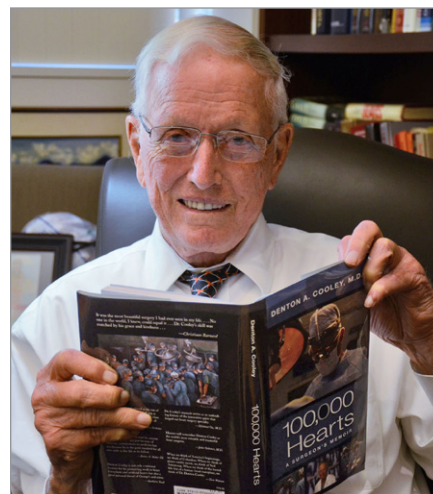
We said goodbye to Dr. Cooley on 28 November 2016 in a beautiful ceremony at Trinity Episcopal Church in downtown Houston. His eldest daughter, Mary Cooley Craddock, and his son-in-law and the Surgeon-in-Chief at Texas Children's Hospital, Dr. Charles D. Fraser, Jr., eulogized Dr. Cooley, emphasizing his personal side and his love of family, his loyalty to his Texas Heart Institute team and to his friends, his pride in the Texas Heart Institute, his desire to see it flourish long after he was gone, and his dedicated care of patients.

In addition to his greatness as a heart surgeon, these were all qualities that we recognized and admired as part of Dr. Cooley. He always inspired us to do our best in our professional and personal efforts, and to make certain that “patients come first.”

The Texas Heart Institute, founded in Houston by Dr. Cooley, has a name and a reputation that are recognized throughout the world. It is a place where great care has been given and continues to be given to patients with every imaginable cardiovascular disease—some of the conditions so serious that physicians elsewhere have told those patients they are “too sick to be helped” or are “beyond the ability of our center to help you.” Here at THI, these same people most often are helped and are returned to useful and productive lives.

The Texas Heart Institute is also recognized worldwide as a “go-to place” to receive the highest quality of training to become an outstanding heart surgeon, cardiologist, interventional cardiologist, electrophysiologist, anesthesiologist, pathologist, and more. Further, we are recognized for the original development and clinical application of left ventricular assist devices, and for helping a greater number of severe-heart-failure patients with these devices than has any other medical center in the world. Today, we are performing pioneering work in detecting and treating vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque, as well as in developing new cell-based therapies to regenerate injured hearts and blood vessels.

It is fair to state that in most foreign countries the best-recognized names within the Texas Medical Center—the world's largest medical center—are the Texas Heart Institute and The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.



Denton A. Cooley, MD

For the Texas Heart Institute, that reputation has been built through the pioneering efforts of Dr. Cooley and the outstanding cardiac surgeons who formed his team; through the efforts of our equally outstanding cardiologists at work across the spectrum of cardiovascular disease; and through the dedication of our nurses, technical support staff, and other members of our professional staff. For more than 50 years, these efforts have been almost entirely supported by grants and philanthropy, most often contributed by generous and grateful Houstonians.

Nor are we finished. The Texas Heart Institute will expand its effort to help large numbers of patients by broadening its endeavor to develop interventional and surgical therapies that are ever-more minimally invasive and catheter based, while maintaining and advancing our skills in cardiovascular surgery and the continuing development of cardiac support devices. Similarly, we seek to further develop and clinically apply cell-based and gene-manipulation therapies that in the future, we believe, will often prevent cardiovascular disease in human beings; and when prevention is not possible, we will modify cardiovascular problems so that patients can live long and productive lives.

To Dr. Cooley, we say this: We are very grateful for your mentoring, your leadership, your inspiration, your encouragement, and for the personal example you have set for us all. Please be assured that we shall continue what you began. We shall see it through until cardiovascular disease is no longer the major killer of men and women throughout the world.

*James T. Willerson, MD,
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and Editor-in-Chief,
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