J. Graham Smith Jr, MD (November 22, 1926-May 18, 2010).

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J. Graham Smith, Jr., M.D.

November 22, 1926 – May 18, 2010

With the passing of J. Graham Smith, Jr. on May 18, 2010, following a short illness, dermatology lost one of its most distinguished envoys. (Figure 1) Skee*, as he was known by his many friends, held the important offices in American dermatology for which he made many significant contributions.

**Background**

Skee was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina on November 22, 1926. After he received his M.D. degree from Duke University School of Medicine in 1951, he interned at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Chamblee, Georgia, following which he spent his first two years of dermatology training under J. Lamar Callaway at Duke. He, then, moved to the new University of Miami School of Medicine, under Harvey Blank, for his third year. He remained at Miami and Jackson Memorial Hospital for an additional three years, rising to the rank of assistant professor.

From 1960-1967, he was at Duke, as associate professor and then full professor. In 1967, he was invited to organize the Department of Dermatology at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, a post he held for the next 24 years. In 1991, he moved to Mobile, Alabama to chair the Division of Dermatology at the University of South Alabama in Mobile from 1991-1998, then becoming professor emeritus. After retiring from his academic chores, he maintained a private practice in Mobile at the Diagnostic and Medical Clinic through December 2009.

His research interests ranged from actinic elastosis to pseudoxanthoma elasticum. He helped to delineate the amino acid make-up of elastin. His inaugural presentation at the American Dermatological Association meeting at The Homestead, Hot Springs, VA in 1963 was on “The Dermal Elastoses,” caused the late Morris Waisman to remark:

> Four years ago Dr. Smith delivered before this association the award-winning essay on the aging sebaceous gland. In this paper we have just heard, the same excellent standards of scholarship are reflected.¹

His pension for dermatopharmacology led him to publish on acne treatments from retinoids to topical tetracycline and benzyl peroxide preparations, as well as on antifungal agents and topical triamincolone. He had worked on the initial clinical trials of
griseofulvin with Harvey Blank. Skee was among the first to recognize the dangers of hepatitis B infections in dermatology, and he was an early proponent for dermatologists to wear protective gloves. 

**Accomplishments**

In our specialty, he held the presidency of the American Academy of Dermatology, the American Dermatological Association, and the American Board of Dermatology, serving on the Board from 1974-1984. His other leadership posts included the Society for Investigative Dermatology, the Association of Professors of Dermatology, the Section of Dermatology of the Southern Medical Association, and the Section of Dermatology of the American Medical Association, making him unique in holding the highest office of the leading dermatological societies.

Skee always had a bent for medical journalism. As the founding editor of the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* in 1979, he set the high standards for which the publication has been known, serving as Editor-in-Chief for a decade. He later became Editor-in-Chief of the *Southern Medical Journal*, for which he wrote pithy editorials, including *Darwinian (evolutionary) Medicine* and *Do Patients Listen?*. He also had served on the Editorial Board of the *Archives of Dermatology, Journal of Investigative Dermatology, Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *Cutis*. Skee was among the first to accept an appointment to *SKINmed*, and his comments and recommendations were always valued. He regularly attended the annual meetings of the Council of Dermatology Editors.

His many honors included the Distinguished Service Award of the Southern Medical Association in 2005 and the Gold Medal from the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) in 2009, as well as Honorary Membership in 1997 and Master Dermatologist recognition in 2003. He was elected to Honorary Membership in the American Dermatological Association in 1996. Skee was a recipient of the Samuel J. Zakon Lectureship of the History of Dermatology Society in 1997 for his presentation “A Fifty-year Potpourri.” (Figure 2) This was actually his second Zakon presentation, for in 1981, when the late David Williams became ill, Skee read his presentation, entitled: “De mortuis nil nisi bonum.” An additional honor was the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Alabama Dermatology Society.

**Anecdotes**

Skee was an ambassador par excellence. His loved to travel and lectured around the world to numerous scientific congresses. Planning for trips was not always that simple in academia. At the Medical College of Georgia, he applied for permission to participate in meetings in Cairo, Rome, and Athens. He was told by the Dean’s office that it was unnecessary to leave Georgia to visit these cities. (LEM)

Skee and Jean often attended the annual meetings of the British Association of Dermatologists. One July, Dick and Marie Dobson joined them. The foursome boarded
the train for Nottingham at St Pancras Station in London, the many pieces of luggage in tow. About and hour and a half out of London, they saw that many people were preparing to debark at the next station, and so they joined in, only this was not Nottingham. Within minutes, a kind soul came to their rescue at Loughborough and drove the quartet some twenty miles to Nottingham. (RLD)

On one of the trips in the mid-1980’s to the Zagazig Conference on Dermatology and Venereology, Skee decided that this must be a Smith family reunion. Although Edgar Ben Smith, then of Albuquerque, N M, and Lowell Goldsmith, then of Rochester, NY had “smith” in their names, they were not blood relatives. (LEM)

In the early 1970’s, Skee served on the General Medicine Study Section of the National Institutes of Health, along with Dick Dobson and Wilt Fisher. Because some of the grant applications needed significant revisions, the three decided to call upon several of the young investigators. After a day’s work, they would have dinner, and they usually ordered a dry Beefeaters martini, up. Dick asked Skee to think of a name for the drink. In a few minutes, he announced the cocktail to be a Dobson. The name spread rapidly, for Dick was on the West Coast months later and ordered his usual, which can be a mouthful, and the barmaid called out, “You mean a Dobson.” (RLD)

Skee might be considered the perfect example of the type A personality. In 1975, when the AAD hired its first executive director, the officers suggested that he should visit several promising candidates for future Academy leadership positions. Years later, Skee inquired who had been the first to be interviewed. When he learned that he was, indeed, the first to receive such a visit, he remarked, "see Claxton knew even then that I was the most important.” (BPC)

As Founding Editor of Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, he was instrumental in the design of the publication. He chose the blue colors, for which the journal is now known, as they were the colors of Duke, his alma mater, and of whose basketball team, he was an avid fan. (JHE)

Matching colors was not one of his strong points. Skee was colorblind and could not choose ties, shirts, and suits that were necessarily compatible. The chore of sartorial compatibility fell to Jean, his wife of 60 years. (LCP) There is an apocryphal story that a resident once mixed up what Jean had organized, but no one that day noticed anything askew. (LEM)

His Legacy

Jean Butler Smith, their three children, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren, survive Skee, along with a younger brother. His legacy to dermatology will long continue.

References:

- As an infant, he was given the nickname of Skeeball, and the name Skee stuck with him from then on.

Figure 1. J. Graham Smith, Jr. in a recent photograph.

Figure 2. Skee giving the Zakon Lecture.

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