

Allyn Bryson Ley

December 5, 1918 – September 29, 2006

Allyn Bryson Ley, MD, Director of the Cornell University Health Services and Cornell University Professor, 1971-87, died in Ithaca on September 29, 2006, after suffering complications following a fall.

In the words of the present Director, Janet Corson-Rikert, MD.

“our university health services has been built on the shoulders of visionaries and heroes. Dr. Ley has been one of the most important of those heroes.”

He was recruited from his distinguished tenure at Cornell Medical College in New York City to restructure and modernize the health services on the Ithaca campus. The list of his noteworthy achievements includes the innovative introduction of nurse practitioners as clinicians; the provision, despite significant controversy, of reproductive and other sexual health care services for students; the institution of a broad volunteer program creating opportunities for students and the broader Cornell community; the transition from the large Sage Infirmary complex to a small overnight unit at Gannett; the development, in cooperation with a local pharmacist, of the first college health service drug formulary; expansion of services in counseling and psychotherapy, radiology, occupational medicine, sports medicine, physical therapy and travel medicine; and the expansion of the medical laboratory at Gannett, which, on his retirement was named in his honor.

Dr. Ley used his research talents here in Ithaca, cooperating, for example, with Sloan Kettering, in studying the insidious spread of the scourge that became known as AIDS.

These many accomplishments reflect the fact that he was a national leader in expanding college health services to meet the increasingly complex medical and mental health care needs of students. He was able to do so much because of his extraordinary imagination both about the goals for his institution and the people who could work toward those goals. He was a beloved mentor and example to his staff who continue to honor his commitment to the provision of high quality and relevant health services in the Cornell community. And he did all these things while continuing to offer his particular expertise in caring for individual patients with extraordinary attention to the complex details of their lives.

Part of Allyn Ley's vision was the conviction that Cornell could significantly cooperate with the Ithaca community in the delivery of effective health care not only to students but also to the local population. Those ideas evolved in a unique town-gown collaboration enabling the growth and increasing the vitality of Planned Parenthood of Tompkins County. When Dr. Ley arrived in Ithaca in 1971, student agitation had led the university to ask Ithaca's fledgling Planned Parenthood to operate a contraceptive clinic for students and townspeople in Sage House on East State Street. At Dr. Ley's invitation, the clinic and the agency's offices were moved to the third floor of the underused Sage Infirmary and, strengthened by considerable in-kind support from Cornell, Planned Parenthood was able to expand its services. For ten years, until Dr. Ley was able to consolidate the University Health Services in an enlarged Gannett Health Center on the main campus, this unique partnership provided high quality reproductive health care to large numbers of women and men from Cornell and the larger Ithaca community.

Allyn Ley was born on December 5, 1918 in Springfield, Massachusetts, the fourth son of Leo L. Ley and Lovira Tait. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1939 and received his medical degree from Columbia Physicians & Surgeons in 1942. He served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy from 1943-46. For 17 months during World War II, he was the sole medical officer on the USS Haynesworth, a destroyer stationed in the South Pacific. During his

service, his ship was nearly capsized by Typhoon Cobra and also attacked by a kamikaze fighter.

After the war, Allyn did his residency at New York Hospital/Cornell Medical College and went on to Harvard Medical School where he did a two-year research fellowship in hematology at the Thorndike Institute. He returned to Cornell Medical College as a faculty member and researcher at Memorial Hospital/Sloan Kettering Institute and served as Director of Hematology and the Blood Bank. His most significant accomplishment as a hematologist was the discovery of an immunologic reaction to penicillin. This was widely recognized as a seminal discovery that led to better understanding of many drug reactions. Allyn refocused his later career at the Medical College on developing new methods of health care delivery, and in 1963, he was appointed Director of Ambulatory Services at New York Hospital and continued to teach as a Professor of Medicine until he came to Ithaca.

In retirement, Allyn stayed active in the community, overseeing the Allyn B. Ley Clinical Laboratory, driving for Gadabout and serving on local boards such as Challenge Industries and Kendal at Ithaca. He was also an active member of the City Club, Ithaca Yacht Club, Ithaca Bridge Club, First Congregational Church and Forest Home Chapel.

Allyn loved to travel, frequently traveling around the country and abroad. In 1969, he, accompanied by his wife, Barbara, spent a year in Tunisia as the Chief of Staff of the SS Hope, a floating hospital that provided medical education and care in developing countries. He also spent six weeks in 1985 providing medical care in a remote refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border, a dangerous but deeply rewarding endeavor.

Throughout his long life, Allyn was guided by a strong sense of fairness, generosity, kindness and the importance of family and community. He was an extremely devoted husband, father, mentor and friend who offered unwavering love and support to untold numbers of students, staff and colleagues, to his large circle of

friends and adoring family. A jovial and charismatic person, he often said he was born with “happy genes” and was grateful for what a lucky and rewarding life he had lived. He is survived by his brother, Gordon; his second wife, Barbara Goble Ley; his six children, Bryson, David, Christopher, Douglas, Bradford and Marcie; and his six grandchildren, Colin, Duncan, Casey, Jenny, Max and Desmond. His first wife, Sidney Barr Ley, and his two brothers, Robert and Douglas, predeceased him.

Rosalind Kenworthy, Chair; Kate Potteiger, Nianne VanFleet