

Giants in Chest Medicine

Talmadge E. King Jr, MD, FCCP



Harold R. Collard, MD, FCCP
San Francisco, CA

Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand.

—Colin Powell

You can observe a lot by just watching.

—Yogi Berra

Talmadge E. King Jr is a sports fan, and he lets you know it. As he says in the video interview accompanying this piece, “I’ll watch 5 year olds playing soccer.” This is a symptom, I have come to believe, of a constitutional joie de vivre that is immediately apparent, endearing, and that informs much of Talmadge’s approach to life and leadership. From 20 years of working closely together, it is clear to me that Talmadge trusts deeply in the fundamental goodness of people, and works hard to help everyone he comes in contact with—be they patients, trainees, or peers—find happiness and success.

Here are some nuggets from Talmadge’s life that are worth noting: he was a psychology major in college (telling!); he learned of his admission to Harvard Medical School by telegram (surprising!); and he didn’t get into his first choice for residency (comforting!). Talmadge was blessed with outstanding teachers and mentors—from the grade-school guidance counselor he calls his “second mom” to pulmonary giants such as Marvin Schwarz and Reuben Cherniack. It was one such



Talmadge E. King Jr, MD, FCCP

mentor who, while Talmadge was a resident at Emory, hooked him on pulmonary medicine, and, well, thank God for that.

Talmadge’s academic career has focused on the care of patients with interstitial lung disease, and he is without question a generational leader in the field. His contributions to our understanding of the disease idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis bookend the remarkable progress we have made in this disease over the past quarter century, from chairing the international committee that defined idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis to leading the definitive clinical trial of its first approved therapy. Less widely known is Talmadge’s ability as a clinician. Kevin Brown, vice chair of National Jewish Health’s Department of Medicine and a long-time colleague of Talmadge’s, captures what those of us who have seen patients with Talmadge have all witnessed: “Talmadge is an outstanding clinician. Patients

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/AFFILIATIONS: Harold R. Collard, MD, FCCP, is from the University of California San Francisco.

FINANCIAL/NONFINANCIAL DISCLOSURES: The author has reported to *CHEST* that no potential conflicts of interest exist with any companies/organizations whose products or services may be discussed in this article.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: See video interview of Dr King online at journal.publications.chestnet.org.

CORRESPONDENCE TO: Harold R. Collard, MD, FCCP, Department of Medicine, University of California San Francisco, 505 Parnassus Ave, San Francisco, CA 94143; e-mail: hal.collard@ucsf.edu

Copyright © 2017 American College of Chest Physicians. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chest.2016.11.060>

uniformly see him as someone who cares about them as an individual. In addition, he does not intuit anything. He gathers the data, interprets it carefully, generates a differential, and then tests the differential diagnosis against what is known.” As a clinician, Talmadge has helped countless patients and families by bringing clarity to their medical conditions and providing hope in what previously seemed hopeless situations. He considers this his greatest accomplishment.

As Talmadge moved into academic leadership—he is currently dean of the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine—his responsibilities shifted from individual patients and diseases to health care systems and the academic enterprise. It is in his capacity as an academic administrator that Talmadge’s leadership qualities have shone most brightly. “Talmadge is an intuitive listener and synthesizer,” says Sam Hawgood, chancellor of the University of California San Francisco. “He is often the last to speak, providing the most interesting and insightful comments and clearly summarizing the central issue at hand.” Talmadge’s peers consistently mention this quality. When the conversation is winding down and everyone has had a chance to voice his or her perspective, Talmadge is often the one to summarize and provide a vision for moving forward. Talmadge has what Dr Hawgood calls “an intense desire to speak the truth; a commitment to identify the essence of a subject and talk about it.” His attention, perception, and insight are remarkable.

The intent of this piece is not hagiography, although I admit my bias is strong. And I am not alone. Everywhere I go, people know Talmadge King. They ask me how he is and tell me about some anecdote or

another that they remember from when he was visiting their institution or when they shared a podium at some conference. To a person, there is true affection and admiration in their voices. I think this is because Talmadge, despite his achievements and success, has remained the kid from small town Georgia who grew up in a family that valued hard work and self-betterment, and who lives by the maternal mantra of “you boys be good.” There is a genuine humility and kindness in Talmadge that leaves a lasting impression. Perhaps Mozelle, his wife of nearly 50 years, says it best: “I am grateful that, at the core, Talmadge is the same person I met many years ago. Intensely focused, steady as a rock, intelligent and witty, caring, generous, and a very good listener. He is always there. This guy. Talmadge.”

Suggested Readings

- American Thoracic Society (King TE Jr, Chair). Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis: diagnosis and treatment. International consensus statement. American Thoracic Society (ATS), and the European Respiratory Society (ERS). *Am J Respir Crit Care Med.* 2000;161(2 Pt 1):646-664.
- King TE Jr, Pardo A, Selman M. Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. *Lancet.* 2011;378(9807):1949-1961.
- Schwartz MI, King TE, eds. *Interstitial Lung Disease.* 5th ed. Shelton, CT: People’s Medical Publishing House, 2011.
- Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis Clinical Research Network, Raghu G, Anstrom KJ, King TE Jr, Lasky JA, Martinez FJ. Prednisone, azathioprine, and N-acetylcysteine for pulmonary fibrosis. *N Engl J Med.* 2012;366(21):1968-1977.
- Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis Clinical Research Network, Martinez FJ, de Andrade JA, Anstrom KJ, King TE Jr, Raghu G. Randomized trial of acetylcysteine in idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. *N Engl J Med.* 2014;370(22):2093-2101.
- King TE Jr, Bradford WZ, Castro-Bernardini S, et al; ASCEND Study Group. A phase 3 trial of pirfenidone in patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. *N Engl J Med.* 2014;370(22):2083-2092.
- Broadbuss VC, Mason RJ, Ernst JD, et al., eds. *Murray & Nadel’s Textbook of Respiratory Medicine.* 6th ed. New York: Elsevier; 2016.
- King TE Jr, Wheeler M, Bindman A, et al., eds. *Medical Management of Vulnerable & Underserved Patients: Principles, Practice, & Populations.* 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Com; 2016.