

Kaiser Permanente Medical Pioneer Morris F. Collen, MD, Passes at Age 100

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Heritage writer



Dr. Morris Collen enjoying the Pacific Ocean aboard the "Flying Sorceress" 1957. Dr. Morris Collen passed away Saturday night at the age of 100; the official Kaiser Permanente obituary is posted [here](#).

Dr. Collen ? Morrie, to us ? was a treasure in Kaiser Permanente's mission-driven history. He was our last living link to the origins of our health plan, from the days before it even opened to the public in 1945.

Dr. Sidney Garfield recruited Morrie to be chief of medicine for the industrial health care program he was directing for workers in the Kaiser Richmond (Calif.) shipyards in July 1942. It was a trial by fire. Dr. Collen recalled: "It was all trauma. At those shipyards, they all had accidents. People were getting run over by trucks. They were falling off the ships. Everybody we saw had injuries."



Dr. Morris Collen with Surgeon General William Stewart, M.D., at multiphasic lab visit, October 1966. Dr. Collen just rolled up his sleeves and began to save lives. He saved lives by pioneering the treatment of pneumonia with penicillin, he saved lives by applying efficient medical diagnostic processes to hard-working longshoremen, he saved lives by using then-new mainframe computers to automate the analysis of those "multiphasic examinations."

The man created entire departments within Kaiser Permanente and pioneered whole fields of medicine. Yet he was always accessible when we had a visiting delegation who wanted to meet him. He'd hold court, nursing a beer and telling long stories about being Henry J. Kaiser's personal physician or running a hospital during the tough years the American Medical Association shunned us, enchanting a roomful of young physicians.

When Dr. Collen moved on from his position as physician-in-chief at KP San Francisco hospital, the doctors and staff put together a goodbye scrapbook for him. One item was a poem, "On Top of Old Geary" to the tune of "On Top of Old Smokey." It included the following lines:

With gentle persuasion
He bindeth our heart
And keeps our institution
From falling apart...

So listen dear Morrie
It's you we sing of
With great admiration
And enduring love.

We couldn't have said it better. He was dedicated, kind, and gracious. We will miss him very much.

An excellent resource for learning more about Dr. Collen's history with Kaiser Permanente is his 1986 U.C. Berkeley [Regional Oral History Office interview](#), as well as [this interview](#) on establishing the Division of Research and Collen's own research into medical informatics.

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