

## SYMPOSIUM HONORING CHARLES S. PETTY, M.D.

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### Introduction: Charles S. Petty, M.D.—The Quintessential Forensic Pathologist

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A scientific symposium honoring Dr. Charles S. Petty was held in November 1989 in Dallas, Texas. Past and present associates and fellows were invited to recognize Dr. Petty upon his completion of 20 highly successful years as chief medical examiner of Dallas County and director of the Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences. One hundred attendees came from throughout the United States, Canada, and Japan to honor Dr. Petty for what he has meant to their careers.

Eleven scientific presentations by nationally recognized names in forensic science covered a spectrum of topics. Most of the manuscripts appear in this issue of the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* as a *festschrift* to Charles Petty.

The idea for this tribute germinated from a discussion by Vince Di Maio and Bill Sturner. I am pleased to have been asked to play a role in this recognition. It was my privilege as chairman of Pathology at University of Texas Southwestern Medical School to recruit Charles to Dallas in 1969. My earlier involvement had been as a member of the special commission to establish a first-rate medical examiner system in Dallas (following the difficulties associated with the Kennedy assassination investigation). The commission's conclusions were to develop a unique institute of forensic sciences, encompassing the medical examiner's office, and also to include toxicology and criminalistic investigation under its jurisdiction. Further, a building would be constructed on the medical school campus and all professional staff would meet the rigorous criteria for faculty appointment at the medical school. These features would tend to ensure independent thought and assure competency of the professional staff. Charles was recruited as a full professor with tenure. Throughout the last 20 years, the institute has reflected his quintessential qualities.

**Quintessence**—Ancient philosophers identified four tangible elements: earth, air, fire, and water. They also recognized a fifth element—something between “matter and the void” which they termed *the ether*. The ether was labeled quintessence or the fifth essence—invisible, intangible, yet ponderable. In modern language, quintessence has come to signify “the consummate example of quality.”

In academics today, one is judged by three major criteria (essences) of achievement: teaching, research, and service. In this arena, Charles has numerous accomplishments in all three areas. His scientifically rich career was initiated from a base of pharmacy and physiology at the University of Washington, and fostered by medicine at Harvard Medical

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School, where he graduated cum laude. Charles' training and experience has led him to the forefront of pathology, especially forensic pathology.

A fourth essence which Charles epitomizes is civility. Always a gentleman in his conduct, he has become recognized as a fair and just person. Charles is involved in several civic activities, some of which touch his profession: Turtle Creek Manor—a highly successful halfway house for teens, suicide prevention, a crisis center, and treatment alternatives to street crime. Equally important are his other interests: he is a widely recognized philatelist, he does woodworking for relaxation, and he possesses a superb firearms collection. From World War II days, Charles has maintained his ties with the alumni of the *U.S.S. Chester*, aboard which he served as a gunnery officer.

What of the fifth essence—the quintessence? Namely, the *ether*, that which is invisible and intangible yet ponderable. I submit that Charles possesses a certain steady magnetic field, the sort of magnetism which attracts strong followers. Associates and fellows have developed a deep respect and admiration for Charles, much more compelling than the first four essences would yield. A sort of awed sense that is felt by even skeptics and cynics. A kind of hero. Among those who know him he *DOES* possess this consummate essence. He deserves our recognition as the **quintessential forensic pathologist**.

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