

HTRS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Q&A with Dr. M. Elaine Eyster, MD, FACP

2019 HTRS Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient



Dr. Eyster is Distinguished Professor of Medicine and Pathology at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and Penn State College of Medicine. She was born in York, PA, and obtained her undergraduate degree from Duke University in 1956. She graduated from Duke University School of Medicine in 1960, and completed her medical residency and hematology training at The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center. Dr. Eyster joined the Hershey Medical Center of Penn State University in 1970. She became division chief of Hematology in 1973, and led the division until 1996. She founded the Hemophilia Treatment Center of Central Pennsylvania in 1973, and is the current Director. Further, she is the medical director of the Special Hematology and Hemostasis Laboratory at Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

In addition to her 2019 HTRS Lifetime Achievement Award, Dr. Eyster has achieved the following honors during her career:

- Who's Who in American Women (1975)
- Who's Who in America (1984)
- Foremost Women of the Twentieth Century (1985)
- Who's Who in the World (1995)
- The Best Doctors in America (2002-2005, 2015-2018)
- Top 100 Health Professionals, International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England

However, she is quick to point out that what she treasures most are the relationships she has with family, friends, and colleagues. She and her late husband, Dr. Robert E. Dye, MD, have two sons, Robert Jr. (Rob) and Charles (Chip), two daughters-in-law, Angie and Alyona, and six grandchildren.

Q&A: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Q: If you could bring one book to a desert island, what would it be and why?

A: It would have to be my family photo albums. I really enjoy photography – especially taking photos of my grandchildren. I have filled many scrapbooks with pictures from memorable

vacations we took and everyday time we spent together. It's wonderful looking back on those special times, when our sons were growing up, and now as our six grandchildren are growing up. In recent years, we've traveled to the Greek Isles, Croatia, and Alaska, and we enjoy spending time in Ft. Lauderdale and other destinations where we can swim, fish, horseback ride, golf, and enjoy nature. I live in the present, not the past, but these albums are very special to me.

Q: Outside of medicine, what other interests or hobbies do you pursue?

A: Cooking, Golf and Photography. I enjoy hosting family and friends for dinner, and also love providing "meals and wheels" to my three grandchildren who live nearby when their parents – a gastroenterologist and a nutritionist – are at work. Chicken Cordon Bleu is my family's favorite, but it has evolved over the years to a more heart-healthy recipe, Lemon Chicken, always accompanied by salad thanks to my daughter-in-law! I have enjoyed golfing since I was a teenager. It is a sport that we as a family played together for many years, and I still play regularly with my friends.

Q: If you could invite anyone, living or dead, to dinner at your house, who would you invite?

A: I would invite good friends with a variety of interests among them, carefully choosing a menu they would enjoy. One choice would be my good friends Margaret (Maggie) Hilgartner (a 2007 HTRS Lifetime Achievement Award recipient) and her husband Milt. Maggie was a pioneer in hemophilia – she headed up the pediatric hematology division at Cornell in New York and was also a Duke University graduate 10 years ahead of me. She was very accomplished, so good at what she did, and she didn't mince words. She was very special and we had a lot of fun together.

Q: A genie in a bottle gives you three wishes...what would you wish?

A: I would wish for good health and happiness for all, and also the ability to distinguish what's really important in life. Someone once said "Family is not an important thing; it is everything." Establishing and nurturing these relationships with family – and also with colleagues and mentors – is so important. My career would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my husband and sons. These relationships are more important than any successes I may have achieved in my professional life.

YOUR CAREER

Q: Who are the mentors who first inspired you to choose non-malignant hematology as a career?

A: I was a fellow when Margaret Hilgartner was on staff at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center. Meeting her triggered my interest in hemophilia, and then I met Ralph Nachman, the chairman of the department of medicine at Cornell. I was more clinically inclined at that time, but my lab was close to Ralph's. He was an excellent researcher and scientist who was a pioneer in vascular biology and a great problem-solver with uncanny instincts. He inspired me to start my career in academic medicine by applying "bench to bedside research," which I have practiced ever since. I love the problem solving and the intellectual challenges that this entails.

Q: Describe a highlight of your career to date

A: When I began my career almost 60 years ago, half of our patients with severe hemophilia died before the age of 20, and the remainder were crippled by adulthood. Since then, I have witnessed hemophilia treatment progress from the use of FFP and cryoprecipitate, to clotting factor concentrates, to longer acting factor products, to even longer acting non-factor products given subcutaneously – and now to gene transfer, with the potential for cure in one treatment. During this time, I have been fortunate to have worked with so many talented colleagues and trainees who have been a continuous source of inspiration, with a team of coworkers who have given tirelessly of their time and talents, and with a dedicated group of patients willing to participate in an endless number of clinical studies. I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity for this remarkable and most rewarding experience.

Q: Describe why you are a member of HTRS and how you think the Society should continue to evolve.

A: What I like most about HTRS is the ability to interact with colleagues who have similar academic interests. The organization is still on a manageable scale where investigators can get to know people with like interests, support each other's growth and development, and encourage early-stage investigators. The grants, awards, and training opportunities are all stellar. HTRS needs to keep this niche and nurture its incredible impact in the broader field of non-malignant hematology.

Q: What words of guidance would you give trainees contemplating a career in non-malignant hematology?

A: First, make sure you have the support of colleagues, friends and family. Then, develop a strong background in laboratory-based hematology – preferably within an academic medical center that has a lab-based research program. It's so important to establish a good relationship with a mentor. And don't be afraid to make mistakes; that's how you learn. Follow your instincts and your heart – but be realistic about what you can accomplish. Take things one at a time – not all at one time. Remember that there is more to life than medicine.