

One of a Kind, Yet One of Us

Dr. Richard Payne devoted his stellar career to easing the pain of his patients, his community

—By Diane Deese

Depending on how you knew him, he was Rich, Richie or Dr. Richard Payne. The ninth of 14 well-loved children, he was born in 1951 into a community—family, church, school—that recognized his determination early and helped him get the education he wanted.

Gifted from the beginning, Richard Payne graduated from Yale University in 1973 with a degree in molecular biophysics and biochemistry, from Harvard Medical School in 1977 with an MD, and never stopped learning: neurology, pharmacology, neuro-oncology, pain medicine. He held top positions at the nation's leading cancer research and treatment centers.

Payne against pain

Ironically, Dr. Payne devoted his professional career to physical and emotional pain. He was a brilliant visionary who pushed untiringly for the rights of all—and especially of underserved minorities—to live and die without pain. He's a past-president of the American Pain Society.

Dr. Payne, 67, died January 3, 2019, suddenly and far too soon. Among many distinctions:

- He was the Esther Colliflower Professor of Medicine and Divinity Emeritus at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. (Esther Colliflower was a Professor of Nursing at Miami-Dade Community College and co-founder of VITAS® Healthcare).



“His spirit as faithful servant and healer’ will forever bless those he touched.”

—Rev. Dr. Iva E. Carruthers,
General Secretary,
Samuel DeWitt Proctor
Conference

“... a scientist and clinician who brought to the international medical community his commitment that all people, and particularly people of color, have access to quality pain management and palliative care.”

—Catherine Alicia Georges,
EdD, RN, FAAN, Professor
and Chair of Nursing,
Lehman College, CUNY,
and National Volunteer
President, AARP

*“He was a leader, a mentor,
a healer and a hero!”*

—Peggy Pettit,
Executive Vice President,
VITAS Healthcare

“As accomplished as he was, he never made other physicians feel he was on a pedestal. He was one of us.”

—B. David Blake, MD, DABFM,
2nd Vice President, Georgia
State Medical Association

- He was the John B. Francis Chair in Bioethics at the Center for Practical Bioethics in Kansas City, Missouri, where he promoted the ACP-AAFC curriculum: Advance Care Planning in African American Communities.
- He led the creation of a progressive palliative care educational curriculum for African Americans at life's end (APPEAL) that was taught widely throughout the country.

Lasting legacy

What lives on is Dr. Payne's legacy on behalf of the hospice and palliative care movement. He was uniquely approachable and particularly supportive of VITAS' collaboration with the Duke Institute on Care at the End of Life, including two initiatives for faith-based organizations: the Crossing Over Jordan symposia examining end-of-life care and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference's Covenant of Care statement promoting quality of life at the end of life for African Americans.

Dr. Richard Payne was remarkable. He was one of a kind, and yet one of us. To me, and to VITAS Healthcare, he was a champion: teaching, encouraging and leading the way.

We honor his memory every time we explain hospice to a physician, a medical organization or a med student; support the outreach ministry of a congregation; address the pain of an African American patient; or comfort a grieving family. We do these things in the name of Dr. Richard Payne.

Diane Deese is Vice President of Community Affairs at VITAS® Healthcare in Miami, the nation's leading provider of end-of-life care.



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