

Charles Drew, M.D.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_R._Drew

Dr. Charles Richard Drew (June 3, 1904 – April 1, 1950) was an African-American physician and medical researcher. He researched in the field of blood transfusions, developing improved techniques for blood storage, and applied his expert knowledge in developing large-scale blood banks early in World War II. He protested against the practice of racial segregation in the donation of blood from donors of different races since it lacked scientific foundation. In 1943, Drew's distinction in his profession was recognized when he became the first African American surgeon to serve as an examiner on the American Board of Surgery.

Early life

Charles Drew was born in Washington, D.C. to Richard and Nora Drew, and was the oldest of four children. In high school and at Amherst College, Drew excelled in athletics and became a All-American in football as a halfback^[1]. Drew was a member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. Two years after college, Drew worked as an athletic director, football coach, and science teacher at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1928, he entered medical school at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Drew continued to excel in sports while at McGill, and joined British professor Dr. John Beattie in blood research. He continued his research when he worked as an intern and later resident at Montreal General Hospital.

Advanced study

Drew received a fellowship from Howard University's Medical School, enabling him to study at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. While at Columbia University, Dr. Drew worked with the renowned Dr. Allen Whipple and with Dr. John Scudder on the problem of blood storage.

The science and practice of blood transfusion had developed from early work including preserving whole blood in refrigerated storage in World War I (see Oswald Hope Robertson) and the practice of having hospital "blood banks" (see Bernard Fantus) in the mid-1930s. Drew focused his own work^[2] on the challenge of separating and storing blood components, particularly blood plasma, as this might extend storage periods. Dr. Drew earned his Doctor of Medical Science degree from Columbia University in 1940, with a doctoral thesis under the title *Banked Blood: A Study in Blood Preservation*. While supervising this program, Drew was also able to prove that water could help preserve blood too, thus helped lay the foundation for using "dry plasma" in blood preservation [1].

Participation in the "Blood For Britain" Project

In late 1940, just after earning his degree, Dr. Drew was called upon by John Scudder to help set up and administer an early prototype program for collecting, testing, and distributing blood plasma in Britain.^[3] Called Blood for Britain, the group was organized around eight hospitals in New York City, who would collect and test blood plasma, package it and ship it to Britain, which by this time had a serious shortage of blood due to the effects of the Battle of Britain.

Dr. Drew created protocols and procedures for the collection, testing, and shipping of blood to England. Total collections came to almost 15,000 people donating blood, and over 5,600 gallons of blood plasma.^[3] However, due to racial tensions during the 1940's in America, there was a great deal of controversy involving whether or not to use black peoples' blood plasma or to limit it to white donors. Furthermore, when the project was turned over to the government in early 1941, the military announced its policy of segregation, and would not mix blood from blacks and whites, leading to segregated donation centers. Despite all his work on the project, and despite the fact that he was the driving force behind its procedures and policies, they refused to offer him leadership of the new project, over objection from Dr. Scudder and others, instead suggesting he be 'assistant director'^[4] While no clear record exists of what Dr. Drew's thoughts were, it is known he left his position there to accept the Chair of Surgery at Howard University that same year.

Teaching career

In 1941, Drew accepted the Chair of Surgery at Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 1943, Drew became the first African American surgeon to serve as an examiner on the American Board of Surgery. He received the Spingarn Medal in 1944 for his contributions to medicine.