

Dr. Robert N. Butler, 'The Father of Geriatrics,' President and CEO of ILC-USA Is Dead

Dr. Robert Neil Butler, President and CEO of ILC-USA died at 10:30 PM on July 4, 2010 (US Eastern Time) at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. He was 83 and the cause was acute leukemia.



As he stated in the interview with TIME Magazine in June, "I am looking forward to working 'indefinitely'," he assumed Professor of his alma mater Columbia University in 2010, and continued working vigorously until just three days before his death.

Dr. Butler was deploying energetic activities, getting over sorrow of the death of Dr. Myrna I. Lewis, his wife and also a working partner in 2005. We heard the sad news unexpectedly in such circumstance. He loved Japanese food, and an eager participant of the weekend Walking Club in Central Park. Everyone around him believed he would play further active role toward future.

Every country in the world is facing the reality of aging today, and sharing the challenges common to human beings. The world was just on the point of seeking for Dr. Butler's wisdom and insight.

Having greatly influenced upon awareness-raising about older people not only in the US but in the world, Dr. Butler was regarded as 'The Father of Geriatrics' or 'The Pioneer.' He left the message, '...the 30 years of life that people gained in the twentieth century ought not be greeted with gloom and doom, but seen for what they are as to be celebrated, understood and appreciated.' He advocated repeatedly: we must be free from prejudice that older people are 'burdensome,' 'useless' or 'dotard,' because they are cheerful fellows who, as well as younger people, could be productive, positively participate in society, and be blessed with flexible thinking.

Graduated from College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University Medical Center in 1953, he started his career as a psychiatrist. Butler's approach to aging was shaped

through his childhood experiences. He initiated in 1961 the Life Review as a therapeutic device, which has currently become established worldwide as one of the epoch-making therapies against dementia. He coined the term ‘Ageism’ in 1968 and strived to abolish age-discrimination actively. Since he offered an ethos of ‘Productive Aging’ in 1982, he continued to voice, “We should not hold discrimination or prejudice toward older people as socially weak. Instead we should recognize older people could remain an integral part of society even in older age.”

His excellent book “Why Survive? : Being Old in America” won a Pulitzer Prize in 1976, which has been regarded as the Bible for learners of gerontology. Reading it once again now, we are still overwhelmed by its deep insights and foresights. Dr. Butler published together with his wife Dr. Myrna Lewis the bestselling “Love and Sex after Sixty,” which commanded interest of Baby Boomers among others.



Dr. Butler continued to exercise leadership since the foundation of ILC-USA in 1990 as the President for 20 years and also as a Co-chair of the Global Alliance since 2009. Dr. Butler, who visited Japan to serve as a panelist of the international symposium held by the Asahi Shimbun “Thinking over Aging Society” in 1987, met Mr. Shigeo Morioka, Hon. President of ILC-Japan (President of Yamanouchi Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd. at that time). It was the first opportunity for both to exchange opinions positively about the vision of the global project concerning aging issues. After three years of preparatory work with the overall guidance of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (currently Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare), ILC was established in Japan and USA in 1990 and launched a grand project concerning international and interdisciplinary survey and research, and education and publication of aging issues.

Dr. Butler aged 63 then was the founding Director of the National Institute on Aging at the US National Institutes of Health, then became the founding Chair of the Department of Geriatrics at Mount Sinai Medical School in NY, and subsequently he made effort to

establish and place in orbit diverse aging related organizations in the US. Dr. Butler was already a man of great stature in the field of aging issues.



The first US-Japan Annual Meeting at Mount Sinai Medical Center in 1991

Second from left: Mr. Shigeo Morioka, Hon. President of ILC-Japan, Center: Dr. Robert N. Butler,
Second from right: Dr. Hideo Ibe, first President of ILC-Japan

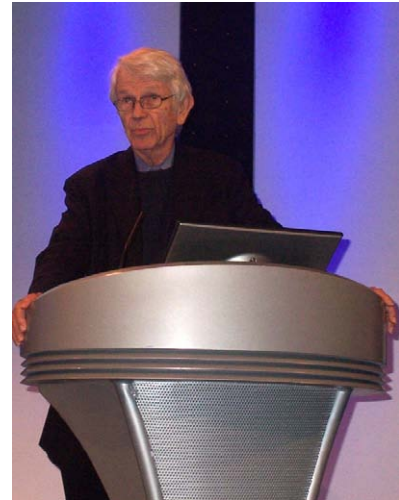
Internationally, Dr. Butler chaired the 1st International Assembly on Aging held by the United Nations in 1982. His speech at the Salzburg Seminar in 1983 was so impressive that it passed into legend. After the foundation of ILC-USA, in particular, he tirelessly developed energetic activities. In 1995 President Clinton named him Chairman of the 1995 White House Conference on Aging, and thereafter he played an important role at all the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Conferences. In the 2nd UN International Assembly on Aging in 2002, he submitted “The Declaration of Human Rights of Older Persons,” which was approved by the delegates from the 160 nations in the world and formed the backbone of the final report.

In honor of such activities, the Heinz Family Foundation presented him with the 10th Heinz Award for Human Condition in 2003 for his contribution to improvement of rights, needs and QOL of older people in the US. Additionally he was selected one of “the 250 greatest Columbians” in celebration of the University’s 250th anniversary in 2004. He was consistently standing out from all the others in his great achievement.

Also in writing, showing no sign of slowing down, he published an over 600-page voluminous work “Longevity Revolution” in 2008, and “Longevity Prescription” in May 2010.

In the meantime, the ILC member countries increased to 12 centers. We are developing collaboration as ILC Global Alliance.

ILC has promoted unique activities as a community of research and practice, for instance, holding symposiums on the occasion of international conferences on the theme of “Human Rights in an Aging World,” “Do Health and Longevity Generate Wealth?” “The Role and Status of Women in an Aging Society,” “Living Longer, Working Longer,” etc., and tackling in a cooperative way selection and solution of challenges in respective country.



Surely, all these achievements were made possible by great foresight and global view of our visionary leader Dr. Robert Butler.

Dr. Butler was truly living proof of “Productive Aging.” Following in Dr. Butler’s footsteps, ILC-Japan intend to continue to make effort for the attainment of human rights of older people and “Productive Aging” in collaboration with other centers of ILC Global Alliance.

Finally we pray sincerely for the repose of Dr. Butler’s soul.

(A memorial service in his honor was held on September 29th at 4 P.M. at All Soul's Unitarian Church in upper Manhattan.)

Articles : **ILC-USA** <http://www.ilcusa.org/>

NY Times <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/07/health/research/07butler.html>

TIME <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2002134,00.html?xid=rss-topstories>