

# Honoring the Life, Legacy of Alec W. Clowes

*An excellent surgeon. A vascular scientist regarded as one of the best. And an even finer human being.*

All of the above describe the late Alexander Whitehill Clowes, MD, who died of a brain glioblastoma in July 2015 at age 68.

In his honor, the SVS Foundation has established the Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture, to be given yearly at the annual Vascular Research Initiatives Conference. The first lecture will be delivered in May by William Sessa, PhD, a distinguished



DR. CLOWES

vascular biologist whose research focus is closely related to that of Dr. Clowes (see adjoining story).

Known as Alec, Dr. Clowes received SVS' highest honor, the Lifetime Achievement Award, in 2015. He served on the Board of Directors of the

SVS Lifeline Foundation (now the SVS Foundation) from 1994 to 2003 and played a critical role in two initiatives that have had a longstanding impact on vascular research, VRIC and the K08 Career Development Award Program.

"Alec, if not the pre-eminent vascular surgeon-scientist of our generation, is definitely in the top two or three," said Dr. Larry Kraiss, who trained with Dr. Clowes from 1989-91 and again from 1993-94. It is difficult to combine surgery and science, as Dr. Clowes did, said Dr. Kraiss. "Alec did both successfully and with excellence."

This lectureship seeks to continue his considerable legacy. "Alec thought legacy was very important," said Dr. Kraiss. "He felt one could expand his

## Support New Lecture in Perpetuity: Please Donate Today

This year is the first for the Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture, and will be delivered by William Sessa, PhD. Each year, the lecture recipient will be an esteemed vascular biologist or vascular surgeon-scientist who has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to research in vascular disease and who exemplified the qualities of Dr. Clowes.

The SVS Foundation has established a fund for donations to support the Clowes Distinguished Lecture in perpetuity. To contribute, donate online at [vsweb.org/ClowesLecture](http://vsweb.org/ClowesLecture) or send checks, made payable to SVS Foundation and with "Clowes Fund" in the memo line, to: SVS Foundation, 35312 Eagle Way, Chicago, IL 60678-1353.

## Keynote Speaker at VRIC Is Following in Dr. Clowes' Intellectual Footsteps

Blood vessels and nitric oxide link Dr. Alec Clowes, MD, and Dr. William Sessa, PhD. And those links make Dr. Sessa the perfect choice to give the inaugural Alexander W. Clowes Distinguished Lecture.

Sessa will discuss "New Insights into Arteriogenesis and Blood Flow Control," at 9:30 a.m. May 3, during the annual Vascular Research Initiatives Conference in Minneapolis, Minn.

"Alec spent his whole life, really, studying how blood vessels respond to injury," said Dr. Michael Conte, a mentee of Dr. Clowes. "In many ways, Alec really was one of the landmark investigators in the field of vascular injury for more than three decades." He investigated the origins, mechanisms and treatment for the vascular response to injury that results in intimal hyperplasia and restenosis, limiting the durability and effectiveness of vascular reconstructions.

Some of this work led to the discovery that blood vessels make nitric oxide to regulate their size and thickness. Dr. Sessa, an experimental pharmacologist and vascular biologist, has worked primarily with nitric oxide and how it is generated in both healthy and diseased blood vessels.

The two men did not work directly together, but knew each other and each other's work, Dr. Conte said. "Both wanted to know about how vessels talk to each other and how growth is regulated." And both wanted to learn how to help predict vascular injury and prevent complications and failures in procedures.

"Vascular disease is very common. Scientists want to understand how it occurs, why it occurs in certain locations in the vascular system more than in the body, whether it stabilizes and whether it progresses. And surgeons, like Alec, are motivated to investigate as to why our procedures don't last forever," said Dr. Conte.

The answers, he said, are critically important. And the work must continue.

impact not just through his individual work but also through the work his trainees did after they left his lab. And his influence would be transmitted through several generations of trainees."

Dr. Clowes was known for maintaining relationships with his trainees long after they had gone on to other institutions. He was a sage adviser, having already faced and solved many of the problems his mentees would probably face in their own institutions. His lasting impact on Dr. Kraiss and Dr. Michael Conte stems from the collaborative Mentored Clinical Scientist Research Career Development Award (K08), funded by the SVS Foundation, the American College of Surgeons and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. "Alec was instrumental in establishing that program and definitely encouraged me to target that award as a key stepping stone in my career, which it turned out to be," said Dr. Kraiss.

Dr. Clowes' door was always open to his mentees seeking help with grant applications, giving time and attention to the proposals. "He would help you improve it or change it in a way to make it more competitive. It was a true investment on his part," said Dr. Kraiss.

Dr. Kraiss is not alone in his praise of Dr. Clowes and appreciation for the continuing relationship. At the 2016 VRIC, a number of his trainees – known collectively by many as "Clowes' Clones" – paid homage to a man they respected, admired, loved, and missed.

Dr. Clowes, said Dr. Randy Geary, was proud of working with SVS to continue to support young investigators in basic and clinical science. "Very few of us will ever be able to see their legacy play out, and while there is no silver lining to what hap-

pened to Alec, you can see here (looking at those present at that VRIC dinner) what his legacy is. He knew his legacy was playing out through all of us and was very proud.

Through Dr. Clowes' mentoring, Dr. Geary received an NIH R01 grant at about the time the K08/SVS matching program began. He had met Dr.

"[The Clowes Lecture] isn't just to pay homage. It is so we can still inspire today's young scientists to follow his path." - Dr. Larry Kraiss

Clowes in the mid-1980s while in med school and later worked in his laboratory for three years. "Other than my parents and my wife, he was the most important person in my life for over half my life."

"I have wanted to call him, and tell him things," said another surgeon-scientist. "You can't replace someone like that, but we can all try to live up to his expectations a bit more. There was a lot to admire in not just his approach to life but also to how he handled his last year."

Dr. Michael Conte first met Dr. Clowes at VRIC. The two always discussed Dr. Conte's research, eventually developing a close relationship, both scientifically and personally. "He was a great mentor to a great many people, and was very committed to supporting young surgeon-scientists," Dr. Conte said.

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