

Dr. Lester Skaggs: 1911-2009

Last year we lost one of the “founding fathers” of medical physics in the United States, Professor Lester Skaggs. Dr. Skaggs obtained his Ph.D. in Nuclear Physics in 1939 and was soon recruited into the war effort, where he was part of the team of scientists who developed the detonation device for the atomic bomb. After the war, he focused his attention on the peaceful uses of atomic energy. At the University of Illinois he, along with colleagues (and future AAPM Presidents) Larry Lanzl, Gail Adams, and John Laughlin, worked with Donald Kerst to develop the 1st betatron for radiotherapy. Then, at the Argonne Cancer Research Hospital he worked with Larry Lanzl to build the 1st Co-60 unit and later the 1st high-energy linear accelerator to be used for cancer therapy in the US. Also in the mid-‘50s, he and Larry Lanzl developed the 1st MS program in medical physics in the US, which later was expanded to include a Ph.D. program in the 1960s. In the 1970s he, and colleague Franca Kuchnir, developed the 1st hospital-based neutron therapy machine.

Also, during the ‘50s, he developed one of the 1st treatment planning computers—the electronic components, including 26 amplifiers, filled a small room! In honor of this work, and his astonishing career in medical physics, the AAPM is pleased to dedicate this session on dose calculation and treatment planning to long-time colleague and pioneer of medical physics in the United States, Dr. Lester Skaggs.