

From the Women in Thoracic Surgery 'Oracle' Summer 2012:

## Surgeons of Excellence: Carolyn Elaine Reed, MD

By Davida A. Robinson, MD



Dr. Carolyn E. Reed is a great example of leadership in surgical education, research, and administration. In addition, Dr. Reed has long championed the advancement of women in the field of cardiothoracic surgery. Because of these great attributes and her selfless dedication, Dr. Reed has been chosen to represent the ideals of WTS as a Surgeon of Excellence.

Carolyn E. Reed was born and raised in Farmington, Maine, along with her fraternal twin sister. Born to her educator father and nurse mother, Dr. Reed credits her parents for being her greatest influences. Her father was a Professor of Education at the University of Maine, formally named Farmington State Teachers College, and her mother was a school nurse. After the illness and untimely death of her father from renal cell cancer at the age of 49, during her early college career, Dr. Reed solidified her decision to become a physician. However, Dr. Reed did not always believe that this decision was economically feasible. Dr. Reed shares that she was originally going to go into nursing because she knew that her family could not afford the expense of medical school. However, as fate would have it, while driving down a back road in Maine with her mother, her mother pulled over and said, "*You really don't want to be a nurse, do you?*" She replied, "*No, but I knew we could not afford [medical school].*" Her mother replied, "*Where there is a will, there is a way.*" Her mother became her greatest supporter and Dr. Reed states that she has never forgotten that moment, because it was the green light that she needed.

After obtaining a BA degree, with high honors, in chemistry at the University of Maine, Dr. Reed attended medical school at the University of Rochester. It was at the University of Rochester where she received her Doctor of Medicine degree with honors and distinction in research. Following surgical residency at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, followed by a surgical oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. Although originally interested in surgical oncology, Dr. Reed came to realize during her rotation on the thoracic service that a career path in thoracic surgery better suited her. With the assistance of her mentor Dr. Bill Gay, she was able to convert the second year of her oncology fellowship to the first year of CT surgery residency. Dr. Reed credits Dr. Gay, who remains a lifelong friend and mentor, in providing her with this opportunity. Upon completion of her CT surgical training, Dr. Reed moved to Charleston, South Carolina to build a thoracic oncology program at the Medical University of South Carolina. Presently, Dr. Reed remains at the Medical University of South Carolina, where she is Professor of Surgery; Chief, Section of General Thoracic Surgery; Deputy Director of Clinical Affairs, Hollings Cancer Center; and holds the Alice Ruth Reeves Folk Endowed Chair of Clinical Oncology. In addition to her clinical work, Dr. Reed is a leading clinical and basic science researcher in lung and esophageal cancer. Among her research interests are adjuvant lung cancer trials,

adjuvant esophageal cancer trials, endosonographic staging of lung and esophageal cancer, and molecular markers of lung and esophageal cancer.

Dr. Reed is a member of numerous scientific and medical societies. In addition, she has provided dynamic leadership to numerous local, national, and international professional associations, including the first woman chair of the American Board of Thoracic Surgery (2005-2007), President of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association (2006-2007), Treasurer of Women in Thoracic Surgery (1995-1997), and Executive Council Member and Treasurer of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (2006-2011). In addition to her demonstrated leadership in numerous professional societies, Dr. Reed has also contributed to the body of medical literature through her numerous publications and work on various editorial boards. She has served nine years on the editorial board of the *Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, and she has also served on the editorial boards of *Surgical Laparoscopy and Endoscopy* and the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*. Currently, Dr. Reed serves on the editorial board of the American Cancer Society and is the coeditor of the Shields textbook, *General Thoracic Surgery*. In spite of these noteworthy accomplishments, Dr. Reed maintains that “[her] greatest accomplishment will always be helping [her] patients and families through some of the darkest days of their lives.” It is also her hope that some of her work will make it easier for the young women in thoracic surgery.

So what’s next for Dr. Reed? She plans to play a positive role in shaping the future of thoracic surgery education as it evolves during this state of transition. She is also working on further expanding her interests outside of medicine, including playing the piano and violin, traveling, and joining a book club.

With this, I leave you with my top ten “Reedisms” taken from her 2006 Women in Thoracic Surgery 20th Anniversary, STS Address<sup>1</sup> : Thanks Dr. Reed for being a surgeon of excellence!

10. Never let the little things get you down.
9. Humor is an important part of residency and life in general.
8. Anger is a self-defeating emotion.
7. Always remember that you can learn from anyone.
6. Humility is always around the corner to prevent arrogance.
5. Mentors will change with time and as aspirations change.
4. One can learn a lot about how not to act or lead from a negative relationship.
3. Be willing to constantly grow and realize change is essential to self-renewal.
2. Learn how to play the game.
1. [Playing the game] does not mean that you have to be subsumed.

<sup>1</sup>Women in Thoracic Surgery: Past Reflections, Present Advice, and Future Suggestions, ctsnet. org, Nov. 15, 2006