



## Dr. Gordon D'Arcy Christensen

September 14, 1948 - February 29, 2020

Gordon D'Arcy Christensen, 71, a member of the University of Missouri School of Medicine faculty since 1988, died on Feb. 29, 2020, at his home with his family. The cause of death was cancer.

Dr. Christensen was a Professor of Medicine, specializing in infectious diseases and tropical medicine.

As a physician, he was best known for taking on difficult cases and making elusive diagnoses. For many years he held a clinic for patients who feared they had Lyme disease and for patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Dr. Christensen was serially elected by his colleagues (1996–2012) for inclusion in Best Doctors in America.

As a medical educator for more than forty years, Dr. Christensen took greatest joy in passing on his knowledge and skills to students and colleagues, emphasizing systematics and analytics. His students honored him with four teaching awards. Dr. Christensen took great pride in his undergraduate course, The Practice of Medicine Through Literature. This unique class introduced undergraduate honors students who were considering a career in medicine to the challenges and joys of medical practice as portrayed in literature. Dr. Christensen was a proud member of Alpha Omega Alpha.

Best known in scientific circles for his research into the cause of medical device infections, Dr. Christensen was the first to recognize that the coagulase-negative staphylococci were a major cause of medical device infections, particularly infections of intravascular catheters. After this, while working with his close colleague, Dr. W. Andrew Simpson, they discovered that the capacity to attach to the surfaces of medical devices by forming a sticky layer of bacteria accounted for the predilection to infect medical devices. Dr. Christensen was elected to Fellowship in both the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the American Academy of Microbiology.

Dr. Christensen's career in laboratory research abruptly ended when he "blew the whistle" on the attempt by officials of the Department of Veterans, with the assistance of University of Missouri officials, to conceal and block the criminal investigation into the murder of multiple Veteran patients at the Truman Memorial Veterans Hospital in 1992. This tragedy led to Dr. Christensen appearing before three Congressional Committees. To his bitter disappointment, it did not lead to prosecution of the murderer or punishment of those officials who blocked the investigation and concealed the deaths. Most regrettably, it also did not lead to an explanation for the tragedy or compensation for the families of murdered Veterans.

Dr. Christensen studied tropical medicine in Peru for three months. After this he lived in South Africa for a month while serving as the attending physician on an internal medicine ward at Eshowe Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Nearly all of Dr. Christensen's patients had either or both advanced HIV and tuberculosis. Dr. Christensen led five groups of University of Missouri students, resident physicians, and University physicians to Falmouth, Jamaica, to staff the Methodist Church Clinic for two-week missions. Dr. Christensen also journeyed on short missions to Panama and Nicaragua to provide medical services.

Many of Dr. Christensen's University of Missouri colleagues will remember him for his election to Chair the Faculty Council on University Policy, 2003–2005, and his election to Chief of Staff for the University of Missouri Hospital and Clinics, 2008–2009.

More recently, in 2016, Dr. Christensen was the Democratic candidate to represent Missouri's 4th Congressional District in Congress.

At the close of his life, Gordon finished writing a science fiction novel entitled Charon.

Gordon took great pride in the accomplishments of the three women at the center of his life. His wife, Alice, completed her graduate training in clinical psychology at the Peabody School for Teachers in Nashville. Alice is now a Clinical Psychologist at the Truman Memorial Veterans Hospital. His older daughter, Charlotte, earned a Ph.D. in Astronomy from the University of Washington; Charlotte is now on the faculty of Grinnell College in Iowa. His younger daughter, Janara, earned a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Washington; she is now a Research Scientist at Google.

Gordon was born on September 14, 1948, in Bethesda, Maryland, the oldest child of Jacqueline (Day) Christensen and Thomas Gordon Steffen Christensen.

Gordon grew up in Westchester County, New York, while his father was a member of the faculty of the New York University School of Law. By the fourth grade, it became evident that Gordon could not read. This incapacity dominated Gordon's life through grammar school. Fortunately, the principal at Gordon's school correctly recognized that he was dyslexic. With a tutor, Gordon learned to transcend his learning challenges. He graduated from White Plains High School in 1966.

Gordon met his future wife, Alice Maria Hyde, on September 17, 1966, while they were both Freshmen students at Grinnell College. They married on June 9, 1970, at Calvary Episcopal Church in Columbia, where for many years Alice's father, the Rev. E. Clarendon Hyde, served in the ministry and Alice's mother, Mary Ruth Hyde, served in various church positions. Gordon and Alice both graduated from Grinnell College in 1970.

In 1974 Gordon graduated from Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha. He completed his post-graduate training in internal medicine and infectious diseases at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston in 1979. Later in life (2008), he obtained certification in tropical medicine from the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene after completing a course of study at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in Lima, Peru.

From 1979 to 1988, Gordon served on the Faculty of the University of Tennessee Center for the Health Sciences in Memphis. While living in Memphis, Gordon and Alice had two children, Charlotte and Janara. In 1988, the family moved to Columbia when Gordon joined the faculty of the University of Missouri and the medical staff of the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital. He retired from the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2003 and from the University of Missouri in 2015 with the title of Professor Emeritus.

Gordon was preceded in death by his mother, father, and brother Andrew Henning Christensen (New York City); his step-sister Sara Jay and step-father John Jay (Minneapolis). Gordon was also preceded in death by his parents-in-law (Columbia).

In addition to his wife, Alice, Gordon is survived by his older daughter, Charlotte Ruth Christensen Bowcutt, and her husband, Christopher Nelson Bowcutt, and their son, Simon Gordon Bowcutt. Gordon is also survived by his younger daughter, Janara Maria Christensen, and her husband, Gregory John Valiant.

Gordon is also survived by his step-mother, Andrea Christensen; his sister, Lise Marie King, and her husband, Jeff; his step-brother, Michael Jay, and his wife, Colleen; his

brother, Timothy Thomas Christensen, and his wife, Liza; his step-brother, Hans Tor Christensen, and his wife, Alison; and his step-brother, Kel Ward Christensen, and his wife, Bella; along with Gordon's siblings' seven children.

Funeral services will be held on March 9, 2020, at 12:00 p.m. at Calvary Episcopal Church in Columbia, Missouri, followed by a graveside service at Columbia Cemetery. A reception will follow the services at the home of Brenda Peculis and Frank Schmidt. Memorial donations may be made in Gordon's name to Calvary Episcopal Church, Grinnell College, or the University of Missouri, Division of Infectious Diseases.

Arrangements are under the direction of Parker-Millard Funeral Service and Crematory; 12 East Ash Street, Columbia, Missouri, 65203; (573) 449-4153. Condolences may be left online for the family at [www.ParkerMillard.com](http://www.ParkerMillard.com)

# Cemetery

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**Columbia Cemetery**  
30 E. Broadway  
Columbia, MO, 65203

# Events

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**MAR 9** **Funeral Service** 12:00PM

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Calvary Episcopal Church  
123 South 9th Street, Columbia, MO, US, 65201

# Comments

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“ Loree and I have been moved away from Columbia for 10 years. It was a shock to learn of the passing of this great man. As a Public Health Nurse I experienced his expertise in Infectious diseases, but it is our memories of his 4H work that mean the most to us. His enthusiasm in leading Geology 4H projects inspired my son and so many others. He had a love for the works of L Frank Baum and brought the magic of Oz to a new generation. Blessings to the family. With great sadness and love, Bill Monroe.

**Bill Monroe** - May 02 at 10:57 AM

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“ It made us so sad to read about Gordon's death. We remember him well from various groups at Calvary Church. I also worked with Gordon at various times at the University of Missouri. The obituary reminded us of his family; it is nice to see what your kids are doing now. Charles and I are in Leesburg, VA. Both our daughter Jenn and our son Clark are living in Northern Virginia as well. Sorry we will not be in Columbia for your funeral service. We send our love and best wishes.  
Joyce Mitchell and Charles Stuth



**Joyce Mitchell** - March 09 at 08:17 PM

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“ Dr. Alice Christensen, and the Christensen family, so sorry for your loss! Your family is very talented and the community lost a wonderful person. My thoughts and prayers are with you!

**Peter Jaberg** - March 09 at 12:47 PM

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“ Gordon was a decent and honorable man. I knew him when he was a medical school faculty at MU who came to lead the Faculty Senate. He was always fair though effective in his administration. Later I came to work with him as he pursued election to the Missouri Congressional position. During that time my wife and I visited with him in their home on a number of occasions. He was a shrine of understanding when others grieved. We are blessed to have known him and will miss him dearly.

## Charles and Joy Sampson

**Charles Sampson** - March 08 at 03:08 PM

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“ I spent almost every Thanksgiving holiday with Gord and his family during my years at Cornell. He later served as best man at my first wedding and was able to meet my second husband when he visited out here in recent years. I cherish the memories of the times we spent together and am sorry we didn't see more of each other in later years. Still, we were able to talk by phone over the past several months. He was the finest of men -- so kind, gentle, caring. My condolences to his wonderful wife Alice and to his daughters and their husbands. He loved you all so much; he was so proud of you all.

Lucia Henning Heldt

**Lucia Heldt** - March 08 at 04:05 AM

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“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Gordon D'Arcy Christensen.



March 06 at 02:13 PM

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“ We have fond memories of visiting Cousin Gord and his family in White Plains NY, usually when we would drive down from the Boston area over the holidays. Unfortunately we were not able to stay in close touch with him in later years, although Phil was able to have a wonderful dinner with Gord and Alice a decade or so ago in South Africa when they were visiting that country while Phil was living there. No words about such a "life well lived" could outshine Gord's obituary's description of his service to humanity around the world. We have made a contribution in his honor to Grinnell College's Institute for Global Engagement.

With our condolences to Alice and Gord's entire family,  
Joan, Ann, Eric and Phil Christensen

**Philip Christensen** - March 06 at 11:06 AM

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“ Gordon was true. A true loving husband to Alice, a true loving father to Janara and Charlotte and a true friend. He was a wonderful "second father" to my daughter when young and I leave a tribute to him as the most wonderful family man, dedicated physician, friend and the most honest unselfish person I have had the pleasure to know in my life's journey.  
He lived a life of the highest integrity and kindness. He was so intelligent, yet humble. His patients received the highest level of care that is an example for all physicians to emulate.,They can learn from his example. The world needs more men like him.  
Cathy Holmstrom Silcock,

Cathy Silcock - March 06 at 10:46 AM

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“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Dr. Gordon D'Arcy Christensen.



March 05 at 08:49 PM

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“ Gordon was my house-mate during our senior year at Grinnell, '69-'70. Gordon had the dubious distinction of having his birthday, September 14, drawn as #1 in that year's military draft lottery. How lucky for him and for us all that he had been accepted into medical school and was deferred.  
My condolences to Alice and the entire family.  
Doug Klein  
Niskayuna, NY

Doug Klein - March 04 at 04:56 PM

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“ I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Gordon, when he ran for US Senate Office in 2016...very good man...Prayers for All...

Charlie Roll  
California, Mo.

Charlie Roll - March 04 at 04:47 PM

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“ Guiding Light Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Gordon D'Arcy Christensen.



March 04 at 10:46 AM

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“ I am so sad to learn of Gordon's passing. He was a good man, father, friend and classmate. He made life better for the community in which he lived. Alice, may God keep you and your family in His embrace. With love, Nora Sansone Hoover

**Nora Hoover** - March 04 at 09:37 AM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Gordon Christensen.



March 02 at 08:38 AM