



William Moss, MD

By Jon Bell
For The Scribe

William Moss, MD, wrote the book on radiation oncology. Literally.

The former chair of the Department of Radiation Therapy at Oregon Health & Science University, Moss wrote "Radiation Oncology: Rationale, Technique, Results" and had it published by the medical and textbook company Mosby in 1959. The book became a bestseller in the medical world and went on to see no fewer than eight additional editions, some edited

later by other physicians. The ninth and latest edition, published in 2010, is now available as an e-book.

"It was for a time the only book that dealt specifically with radiation treatment of cancer," said Moss, now 94. "That made my name in the field."

Though he's been retired since late 1989, Moss has fond memories of his time in medicine. OHSU still awards the William T. Moss, MD Annual Excellence in Teaching Award, and his name is one that still holds a place among pioneers

in radiation therapy for the treatment of cancer.

The Scribe: Can you share a little bit about your background?

William Moss: I was born in Ardmore, South Dakota, in 1918, but after about five years, after my father had died, we moved with my mother to Rock Hill, South Carolina, to be with my mother's sister. That's where I was reared. After high school, I went to The Citadel and graduated from there in 1939. Then I decided to go to medical school at Washington University in St. Louis.

The Scribe: What got you interested in medicine?

Moss: Well, it was always something I was interested in. I hate to brag, but I was really good in human anatomy. When I was at Washington University in St. Louis, I had a professor who offered me a fellowship if I would help the first-year medical students with their dissection. So for two years, I helped medical students in the lab with cadavers, circulating around to see if they needed help and if they knew what they were doing. I did that half-time while I was in school to help pay for my medical school, so that really helped keep me interested and involved.

The Scribe: How did you get into cancer treatment?

Moss: After medical school, I had an internship at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis, which is a famous hospital. Then I did a year at the Missouri State Cancer Hospital (now called the Ellis Fischel Cancer Center), but after that I had to go into the service.

I became a captain in the Air Force and served in Guam for two years, just after World War II, when the Japanese were still occupying the island. When I came back, I returned to the Missouri State Cancer Hospital and became a resident in training in radiation oncology. When I was in medical school, I rotated out to the hospital for a one-month period to learn about cancer and radiation. I liked it so much that when I finished school and my internship, I applied for additional training and got that.

The Scribe: Was all your training in Missouri?

Moss: No, my chief at the state hospital said you've got to go to Europe and learn about radiation therapy. That's where a lot of the advances were happening. I got a National Cancer Institute fellowship and went to Manchester, England, where I studied radiation therapy service for one year. After that, I earned a continuation of my grant and did six months at the Curie Institute in Paris, and then became chief of radiation at the Missouri State Cancer Hospital.

The Scribe: What brought you to Oregon?

Moss: I got a letter from the University of Oregon Medical School (now OHSU) asking me to come to Portland and give a few lectures at the medical school. While I was here, the dean called me into his office and said, "We want you up here," so I accepted the offer. I came to Oregon (in 1974) to be the chair of the Department of Radiation Therapy, and I served there until I retired.

The Scribe: Are there any highlights that stick out for you from your career in medicine?

Moss: During all that time early on, I collected materials and thought about writing a book. So I ended up writing a book about cancer treatment with radiation, which was one of the only books then (1959) that dealt specifically with radiation treatment of cancer. I can't claim it to be the first, but it was definitely one of the earliest. It went on to see six or eight editions over about 30 or 40 years, so that really sticks out for me.

The Scribe: How about your life outside of medicine and since you retired?

Moss: I married a girl named Rose Daily and we were married for 67 years. She passed away a few days ago. We had six kids, one is a physician, one is a nurse. In terms of hobbies, I can't say I had any big hobbies. I read a lot, wrote a lot. Writing the book was kind of my hobby. I wasn't out playing tennis or anything like that. Where I live now, at Mary's Woods in Lake Oswego, I still read a lot. I belong to a writing group that meets every other Saturday. We usually write stories about our lives. I've written things about my childhood and all that. It's a very benign life.