

Hopkins' Helen Taussig, noted cardiologist, dies

By David Michael Ettlin

Dr. Helen Brooke Taussig, who won the nation's and medical world's highest honors for her role as co-developer of the "blue baby" operation at Johns Hopkins Hospital, was killed in an automobile accident yesterday afternoon near her Pennsylvania home.

Dr. Taussig, 87-year-old professor of medicine emeritus at Hopkins, was leaving the parking lot of the Pennsbury Township municipal center — apparently after voting in a local election — when she drove her car into the path of another vehicle on U.S. 1, police said.

She was pronounced dead at 4:42 p.m., an hour after the crash, at the Chester County Hospital. A passenger in her car and the driver of the



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DR. HELEN B. TAUSSIG
Developed "blue baby" surgery

See **TAUSSIG**, 4A, Col. 1

Hopkins' Dr. Helen Taussig, developer of 'blue baby' surgery, dies in crash

TAUSSIG, from 1A

other vehicle also were injured, police said.

"Helen Taussig is recognized as the first lady of cardiology in the world, and she will be greatly missed," said Dr. Richard Ross, dean of the Hopkins Medical School, where she had been professor emerita since 1963.

In recent years, Dr. Taussig had lived in the Crosslands retirement community in Kennett Square but remained active in medical and ethical organizations, and in research at the University of Delaware on heart malformations in birds.

She continued to visit in Baltimore with colleagues at Johns Hopkins and, in February, attended a recital at the Peabody Conservatory of Music given in her honor by Samuel Sanders — a pianist who 39 years earlier had undergone the operation developed by Dr. Taussig and the late Dr. Alfred Blalock.

Dr. Taussig was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, by President Lyndon B. Johnson for her role in alerting the public to the dangers of the drug thalidomide. She was the first woman elected president of the American Heart Association, and the list of her awards, appointments, society memberships and honorary degrees was said to run seven single-spaced typed pages.

Yet becoming a doctor had not been easy. She had been told, in applying to the Harvard school of public health in the early 1920s, that she could not get a degree there because she was a woman.

Dr. Taussig was born in Cambridge, Mass., in 1898, the daughter of Frank William Taussig, a noted Harvard economist, and the granddaughter of William Taussig, a horse-and-buggy doctor for whom the William Taussig School for handicapped children in St. Louis is named.

Dr. Taussig studied at Radcliffe College and at the University of California, where she earned her bachelor of arts degree in 1921. She took up medical studies at the Boston University Medical School, where she first became interested in heart malformations, and moved to Baltimore in 1923 to attend the Hopkins Medical School.

Dr. Taussig graduated in 1927 and became head of the Hopkins' Harriet Lane pediatric clinic three years later.

After years of research at Hop-

kins, the real dawn of corrective surgery for patients with congenital heart disease," providing the first proof that patients with heart disease could undergo anesthesia and giving inspiration to doctors in the further development of open-heart surgery.

A quiet, gracious woman, Dr. Taussig referred to the hundreds of children who came to her for treatment as "my babies."

She maintained a large correspondence with many of the youngsters and their families and kept a sizable scrapbook containing snapshots of many of her young patients.

Dr. Taussig remained modest about the honors her work earned.

She once remarked, "You have your sadnesses as well as your successes. One reads all about the successful operations, but not about the

unsuccessful ones, the sorrow and the background of hard work. It's the clinical errors that keep you humble."

"On the whole, though," she added, "I think I've done more good than harm."

Dr. Taussig was the first American physician to conduct an on-the-spot investigation in West Germany of birth defects caused by thalidomide, a tranquilizing drug.

Her report, published in June 1962, aroused the attention of physicians and the public in the United States and led, two years later, to a \$40,000 research fellowship from the National Foundation, which enabled her to direct further studies into the effects of drugs on unborn babies.

A founder of the Heart Association of Maryland, Dr. Taussig served

as the organization's president from 1952 to 1954. She had been a member of its executive board since 1952.

She was a member of the international branch of Physicians for Social Responsibility, a board member of the Right to Die organization and an outspoken critic of the Right to Life movement — and was outspoken to the end with her views on questions of social and medical ethics.

In 1984, Dr. Taussig participated with a panel of distinguished physicians in drawing up guidelines for doctors on life-and-death decisions in the cases of gravely ill patients — including when it is ethical to withhold drugs, and sometimes even food and water.

Dr. Taussig said some doctors "are playing God" in keeping patients

alive after all hope for a meaningful existence is gone and "the course of nature would have them die." And in a later interview with her home, she expressed concern over the high cost of medical care, particularly in cases of heroic but perhaps unrealistic attempts to prolong life.

She remained vitally interested in science and medicine to the end of her life, focusing much of her work on research into heart malformations in birds — which she said were remarkably similar to those in humans.

Dr. Ross, dean of the Hopkins Medical School, had received a letter from Dr. Taussig Monday seeking his help in obtaining a picture of a specimen of a bird's heart that was preserved in a museum in Bologna, Italy, according to Hopkins spokeswoman Joann Rogers. "Dr. Ross had

signed a letter today, to do so," she said.

"Helen Taussig was the most important physician in the establishment of the field of pediatric cardiology and has made contributions for which she will always be remembered in history," said Dr. Bruce A. Reitz, chief of cardiovascular surgery at Hopkins.

Dr. Reitz said he last saw Dr. Taussig in Wilmington, Del., a week ago, and reminded her of a Blalock Lecture — part of a Hopkins series named for her late colleague — to which she was invited. But she told him she would have to miss it because friends were planning a party then for her 88th birthday.

"I was fortunate to know her," Dr. Reitz said. "She was intellectually involved in medicine up until the end of her life."

kins, Dr. Taussig became convinced that "blue babies" — children with congenital heart defects — were "blue" because they did not receive enough oxygen in their blood. The idea led to the development of the so-called "blue baby" operation with Dr. Blalock.

After reading of an operation in Boston in which the ductus arteriosus, a blood vessel not needed by babies after birth, had been closed, Dr. Taussig theorized that if an artery to the heart could be closed, one could also be opened.

When Dr. Blalock became chief surgeon at Hopkins in 1941, Dr. Taussig suggested to him that an operation on constricted arteries of blue babies could save these children from enforced inactivity and early death.

The first Taussig-Blalock operation was performed, unsuccessfully, in 1944, but the next operation and 80 percent of those that followed were successful.

Dr. Denton Cooley, now chief of surgery at the Texas Heart Institute and an assistant in the first blue baby operations, said last night that the procedure was "the dawn of pediatric heart surgery" and that Dr. Taussig was "an institution in herself . . . the most respected pediatric cardiologist in the world."

Dr. Cooley added that the blue baby operation was "very inspiring —