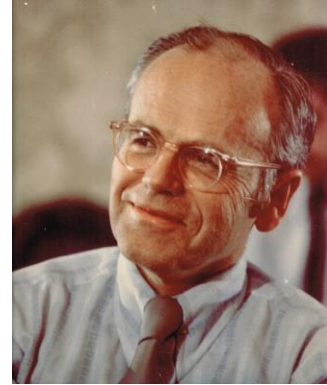


Dr. John D. States
1925 - 2015

John Dunham States, MD, a gifted physician and pioneering public health advocate, passed away March 26, 2015. Known to many as “Dr. Seatbelt,” Dr. States died peacefully at Rochester General Hospital, where he had entered the world 89 years earlier.



Born June 16, 1925, to Dr. Eugene States and Alida Dunham States, he lived almost his entire life in Rochester, raising his family, caring for patients, and teaching medical professionals. As a small child, he walked a mile from the family home on Corwin Road to his elementary school. He attended East High School and the University of Rochester, graduating in 1946. After debating between engineering and medicine, he enrolled at Harvard Medical School. In 1952 he and his bride, Sally Johnson States, headed to Galveston, Texas, where he served as a captain in the Air Force medical corps, and then moved to Boston, where he completed his residency at Massachusetts General Hospital. He then began his orthopedics practice in Rochester and later joined the faculty at University of Rochester School of Medicine. He attended patients for many years at Strong Memorial Hospital and at Rochester General Hospital, where he chaired the Department of Orthopedics.

Dr. States had a lifelong love affair with automobiles, a passion that eventually drove his research interests. He built his first powered vehicle at the age of 10, using a washing-machine motor as an engine. In high school he created “Cy’s Auto Repair” and earned money for college by fixing and reselling junkers. In 1948, he and his brother, David States, MD, drove across the country in a 1939 Chevy. A great fan of sports cars, John eventually combined his hobby and profession by becoming the track physician at Watkins Glen International Speedway.

At the racetrack and in the emergency room, Dr. States learned firsthand about trauma and the importance of automotive design. Race-car drivers often survived horrific crashes because of seat belts, roll cages, and helmets, while ordinary drivers sustained grave injuries from far less severe accidents. In the 1950s and 60s, traffic fatalities in the US were skyrocketing, and safety standards were almost nonexistent. Cars did not have seat belts, headrests or safety glass. Speeds limits were high, enforcement low.

Beginning in 1959, Dr. States addressed this challenge through research and advocacy. At his own expense, he began to document severe crashes. By 1969 he received federal funding to establish accident investigation teams. He became an expert in biomechanics, studying knee, hip, and spinal injuries and developing seatbelt, dashboard, and airbag designs that reduced injury. He won a patent on one seatbelt design. Automotive manufacturers around the world consulted him on how to make safer cars, and both plaintiffs and defendants in accident-related litigation

called him as an expert. In 1969, President Nixon appointed him to the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council, on which he served for eight years. He eventually brought his expertise to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, where he consulted for the Center for Environmental Health and Injury Control.

Among his most important contributions, Dr. States was instrumental in creating the New York State seat belt law in 1984 -- the first in the U.S. and now law in 49 states. The CDC estimates that such laws have saved more than 250,000 lives. He also created the Abbreviated Injury Scale, used internationally to standardize the collection of data on injuries. In addition, he pressed for the first motorcycle helmet legislation, prompting bikers to protest around his home. He authored more than 80 papers during his career.

Dr. States received many awards in his lifetime, including the Excalibur Award from the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council and the New York Society of Medicine's President's Service Award for distinguished service to the community.

Besides his professional interests, Dr. States enjoyed skiing, camping, working in the shop, listening to opera, and grilling over a wood fire, even in the depths of winter. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Sally, and their children, David States, MD, of Ann Arbor (Angel Lee); Randall States of New Haven (Laura Fawcett); Katherine Burke of San Francisco (Bob Burke), and Rebecca States, PhD, of Queens (Mel Meer). In addition, he will be greatly missed by his six grandchildren.

The family is grateful for John's long and richly blessed life. We especially wish to acknowledge the loving and expert care of Dr. Richard Constantino; caregivers Sue Matthews, Patti Katerle and Terry Kirschbaum; as well as others who supported him and Sally in his later years.

No funeral is planned. A memorial service will be held May 30 at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church. In lieu of flowers, please consider memorial gifts to the Association for the Advancement of Automotive Medicine (AAAM, attn John D. States Fund, 35 E Wacker Drive, Ste. 850, Chicago, IL 60601), of which Dr. States was a founder, or the Rochester General Hospital Foundation. Please contact AAAM at info@aaam.org or 847-844-3880 with any questions regarding the donations.