

Dr. Ethelene Crockett dies; gifted physician, civic leader

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Dr. Ethelene J. Crockett, a Detroit physician who became well known for her work with the poor and in civic affairs, died Friday at the age of 64.

Dr. Crockett, a gynecologist-obstetrician, died at her Lafayette Park home at 2:14 a.m. Friday, three months after it was discovered that she had cancer of the liver.

A gifted and energetic woman, whose life seemed to be a string of firsts, Dr. Crockett regrettably retired from her 30-year practice only this fall. She was scheduled to be honored, along with her husband, Recorder's Court Judge George W. Crockett Jr., at a Jan. 19 banquet at Cobo Hall. Banquet planners said the event will still be held.

Dr. Crockett had been intermittently hospitalized at Harper Hospital and was last released Dec. 20.

A MONTH AGO, she told an interviewer she was learning a lot about medicine because of the treatment she was undergoing. She added, in her characteristically blunt way: "Everyone's going to die. The only thing that I know that you don't know is what I'm probably going to die of—not when. I'm not wasting any time dreaming about it or dreading it."



Dr. Ethelene J. Crockett, who said a month ago: "I'm not wasting any time dreaming about it (death) or dreading it."

When Dr. Crockett opened her Detroit practice in 1952, she was the first black woman gynecologist in the state. When she died, she was serving as the first woman president of the American Lung Association national organization. She had recently met with President Carter at the White House in connection with that group's Easter Seals drive.

Dr. Crockett and her husband have been visible and often-criticized leaders in the city where both have espoused liberal causes. Neither has backed down from a stand, however, and Dr. Crockett once confided that

she was gratified when a critical newspaper editorial accused her of being as brilliant and as arrogant as her husband.

OVER THE YEARS, Dr. Crockett divided her medical time between her private practice and public health work with poor women and children.

She was a leader in the 1972 campaign to pass liberalized abortion laws in Michigan and was publicly active in the recent fight against the proposal to cut off state aid for abortions for the poor.

Dr. Crockett frequently lectured on family planning and public health care. She directed the Detroit Maternal Infant Care project at the old Crittenton hospital in 1967-70 and helped design and direct the Detroit Model Neighborhood Comprehensive Health Center.

Her private practice offices at 3800 Woodward were hung with striking artwork of mothers with infants and the waiting room was nearly always crowded with women willingly enduring long waits for a session with a warm, no-nonsense physician.

Dr. Crockett was honestly direct with her patients, quizzing them on their emotional as well as physical health,

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chatting politics at length, and advising them to give up cigarettes while admitting that she couldn't kick her own lifelong chain-smoking habit.

Dr. Crockett, who said she never wanted to be anything except a doctor, made it a practice to encourage girls to consider the profession and one of her own daughters, Dr. Ethelene C. Jones, followed her mother into obstetrics-gynecology.

IN ADDITION to her medical work, Dr. Crockett was a whirlwind civic activist, serving as a board member and president of the Detroit Public Library Commission, as co-chairman of the Detroit Education Task Force and as one of 55 citizens named by the federal court to monitor the Detroit school busing program.

She was also a medical board member at Harper Hospital, a member of the executive board and chairwoman of the health committee of New Detroit Inc. and a member of the Health Care Institute of Wayne State University.

A reporter who once asked Dr. Crockett why she took on so much community work, when she was busy enough medically, was told: "You can't practice medicine in a vacuum. Too many doctors get too narrow-minded."

✶ BORN IN St. Joseph and

raised in Jackson, Dr. Crockett graduated from the University of Michigan and was an honors graduate of the Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C.

She interned at Detroit Receiving Hospital, but took her residency at New York's Sydenham Hospital when she was denied a residency in Detroit because of her race. At the time of her internship, she was only the fourth black doctor accepted for internship at Receiving.

Awards and honors Dr. Crockett received in the past several years included selection last year as the Detroit Medical Society's doctor of the year.

Dr. Crockett and her husband, the judge, were married for 45 years. Their family included their daughter, Dr. Jones; a son, George W. Crockett III, also a Recorder's Court judge; and another daughter, Elizabeth Ann Hicks, a Los Angeles schoolteacher.

A memorial service for Dr. Crockett will be held at 10 a.m. Wednesday at the Hartford Avenue Baptist Church, 18700 James Couzens. A family hour will be held from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Fritz Funeral Home, 246 E. Ferry.

Burial will be in Jackson. Memorials may be made to the American Lung Association of Southeastern Michigan or the Michigan Cancer Foundation.