Doctor Alice Ettinger:  
"Grande Dame Extraordinaire" of Radiology  
Samuel Proger, M.D., and Robert E. Paul, Jr., M.D.

In July of 1982, Dr. Alice Ettinger will have devoted half a century of her talents and efforts as a radiologist to the Tufts—New England Medical Center. There is no doubt that this outstanding woman has been one of the major contributors to the prestige and stature that the Tufts—New England Medical Center enjoys. Because of her impeccable professional competence, inspiring teaching and great personal charm, she has made valued friends around the world, not only among her colleagues in radiology but also among physicians in many other specialties.

Dr. Ettinger was born in Germany on October 8, 1899, just four years after Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen discovered the x-ray. She graduated from the Chamasso Gymnasium of Berlin, Germany, in 1919, and in 1924 from the medical school of Albert Ludwig University in Freiburg, Germany. At that time radiology was not even part of the curriculum of the Medical School.

Dr. Ettinger began her medical career as a resident at the Second Clinic of Charité in Berlin at the Friedrich Wilhelm University. Early in her career, she acquired a deep personal concern for the welfare of her individual patients and believed that she would be able to manage them better if she could add to her armamentarium the diagnostic possibilities offered by the new modality of roentgenology. She applied for and was awarded a six-month residency with Dr. Hans Heinrich Berg, world-renowned for his revolutionary gastrointestinal x-ray studies by use of the "mucosal relief technique." Dr. Berg had designed and built a remarkable machine that allowed one to record the fluoroscopic image on x-ray film — the spot-film device. Fascinated by this new discipline, Dr. Ettinger extended her planned six-month residency with Dr. Berg to two and a half years of intensive radiology training.

Shortly thereafter, early in 1932, as a result of his correspondence with his old friend and colleague, Professor Morawitz, of the University Hospital at Leipzig, Dr. Joseph H. Pratt, of Tufts, became aware of the exciting advances that Dr. Berg was achieving in Berlin. He corresponded directly with Doctor Berg, eager to arrange to obtain the new spot-film device, as well as the services of one of Dr. Berg's associates to provide instruction on how to use it.

Dr. Alice Ettinger arrived in Boston in July of 1932, with the first fluoroscopic spot-film device packed securely in her luggage. What had been planned as a short stay in America turned into a lifetime of outstanding service to medicine and to the New England Medical Center and Tufts Medical School. As a direct consequence of Dr. Pratt's effort, then, modern gastrointestinal radiology was launched in this country at the Boston Dispensary. Dr. Ettinger's "extended stay" at Dr. Pratt's behest turned into a brilliant career, and her superb competence as clinician and radiologist contributed greatly to the early development of the Medical Center.

In 1939 she was made radiologist-in-chief of both the Boston Dispensary and the New England Medical Center Hospital, and in 1959 professor and chairman of the Department of Radiology at Tufts University School of Medicine. Although she was obliged to work almost entirely alone during the years of World War II, accepting the heavy work load with characteristic devotion and energy, she also introduced, in 1945, a radiology-residency program that was destined to grow with the Medical Center and, ultimately, to form the great love of her professional life — teaching. Her enthusiasm for radiology was readily instilled into her many trainees, who are now successfully in practice both in community hospitals and at major academic centers. Dr. Ettinger is one of the rare teachers who have been able to bridge the gap between frontier medical knowledge and compassionate patient care, setting an example for students and residents in the care of patients and the rewards of striving for excellence.
Over the years, she has contributed many excellent publications to the literature, particularly in renal and gastrointestinal radiology, areas that have formed the core of her clinical interests during her long career. A number of her contributions have become classics: "Diagnosis of Disease of the Stomach by Gastroscopic and X-ray Relief Studies," "Bronchial Rearrangement and Bronchiectasis following Pulmonary Resection," "Intravenous Urography in the Patient with Renal Insufficiency," and "Detection of Small Renal Tumors" are just a few examples of her publications.

As an educator, Dr. Ettinger has made her inspiring presence felt not only in the clinic and the reading room but through her many speaking engagements nationwide, as visiting professor, and during her many years as chairman of the New England Roentgen Ray Organizational Committee on Technical Affairs. It was largely through her efforts and interest that one of the earliest formal training programs for x-ray technologists was created at Northeastern University. Indeed, it was under her auspices that a personnel training program was instituted, with the assistance of the Bingham Associates Fund, for the State of Maine. This most successful program resulted in marked improvement of the standards of radiologic techniques and patient protection.

In October, 1965, Dr. Ettinger retired as chairman of the Department of Radiology, but continued as an active clinician and teacher here at Tufts until October 1, 1970. At that time, as Tufts Professor Emerita of Radiology, still brimming with energy at the age of 71, she accepted a new position as consultant and director of student teaching. Her achievements for the Medical School during the last 11 years have been no less impressive than her earlier years in clinical radiology and residency training. She continues to oversee all aspects of the radiology teaching program at Tufts Medical School and personally sponsors the fourth-year one-month elective in radiology, which is extremely popular with the medical students. Many of the students have been eager to let people know that they consider Dr. Ettinger's course the best rotation of their medical-school years.

Dr. Ettinger has been elected to Alpha Omega Alpha in recognition of her dedicated teaching. She has received the faculty teaching award from the graduating class of Tufts Medical School every year since 1971, the year the faculty citations were initiated. In her honor, a lecture series, given by prestigious radiologists throughout the country, has been named the Alice Ettinger/Tufts—New England Medical Center Radiology Lectures.

Dr. Ettinger treasures the fine relations that have developed throughout the years. She is particularly proud of her association with Dr. Joseph Pratt, who was no less proud of her. In 1946, Dr. Pratt said: "I am as proud of what you have done and are doing as if I did it myself. I am deeply grateful that you came to America and all you have accomplished for the advancement of Roentgenology for the past 14 years." Later, in 1952 and 1954 (he was then 82), Dr. Pratt spoke again about his long and valued association with Dr. Ettinger: "It gave me pleasure to express publicly my gratitude for the important part you had in making our diagnostic clinic an outstanding success. . . . I am sure no one has contributed more to our success in diagnosis than you, and I shall always continue grateful to Doctor Berg for sending you to us." The contribution was more than "to our success in diagnosis." It extended to her achievement in setting standards of excellence broadly, for she demanded the fullest possible knowledge, precision and careful attention to detail on the part of all who worked with her. The spirit behind this quest for excellence permeated the entire institution. All of us who prize our association with the Tufts—New England Medical Center are in her debt for her half-century of effort on our behalf.

Dr. Alice Ettinger, whose career has spanned the very concept of radiology itself, has distinguished herself as clinician, consultant, administrator, educator and colleague. She is acknowledged by all who know her to be one of the truly remarkable figures in American medicine. This splendid woman continues to be a dynamic, inspiring and beloved teacher.

Tufts Medical Alumni Bulletin