Obituary: George Ritchie, M.D.

George Gordon Ritchie, Jr., M.D., 84, died at home in Irvington, VA, on October 29, 2007, after a courageous battle with cancer. Ritchie was a widely loved physician, speaker, and author of *Return From Tomorrow* (1978) and *My Life After Dying* (1991), later republished as *Ordered to Return* (1998). Ritchie graduated from the University of Richmond, interrupting his college education to volunteer for the Army in World War II. After the war he graduated from the Medical College of Virginia and was a general practitioner for 15 years. He then completed a residency in Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, winning the William James Award for Research in Psychiatry. He later helped found the David C. Wilson Hospital in Charlottesville and was president of the Universal Youth Corporation for 20 years.

Ritchie might be regarded as the stimulus for the modern near-death experience movement. While undergoing basic training in the Army in 1943, he developed double lobar pneumonia and was pronounced dead, precipitating an elaborate near-death experience that included an out-of-body trip to another city that included verified information and resulted in profound personal and spiritual transformation. At a lecture in 1965 in which Ritchie described that near-death experience, University of Virginia philosophy student Raymond Moody first heard about these experiences. Moody later went on to medical school himself, where he encountered many patients who described similar experiences. These encounters led to Moody's coining the term “near-death experience” and the publication of his 1975 book *Life After Life*, which Moody dedicated to George Ritchie.

Surviving Ritchie are his wife of 60 years Marguerite, two children, two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren, and a world in which, thanks to his efforts, experiences like his can be discussed openly.