



Dr. Nicholas Cummings

In memoriam: NAP Founder Dr. Nicholas Cummings

It is with deep sadness that the National Academies of Practice (NAP) shares the passing of Founder Dr. Nicholas A. Cummings, PhD, ScD on June 8, 2020 at the age of 95. Dr Cummings's remarkable legacy resulted in a vibrant organization consisting of distinguished members highly engaged as profession-based experts in public policy, practice, and scholarship who function interprofessionally by collaborating on advocating policies in the best interest of individuals, communities, and society.

Dr. Cumming's vision for the creation of an interdisciplinary organization emerged in 1976 when he was testifying before the Subcommittee on Health of the US Senate Finance Committee. The issue was Medicare reform and Dr. Cummings was representing the American Psychological Association (APA). During the proceedings, he became disturbed at the lack of cooperation among health care professional societies. Dr. Cummings suggested to his colleagues that what Congress needed was an interdisciplinary body of health care practitioners that would set aside turf battles and advise Congress as to what was in the best interest of all Americans. Clearly, his foresight was remarkable, as his vision still resonates today, especially with respect to COVID-19 where interprofessional collaborative patient-centered care is paramount!

During the ensuing years, the idea of limiting membership to the most Distinguished Practitioners from each profession emerged. It was believed that practitioners who earned profession-specific honors, awards and recognition would be more willing to set aside profession-specific issues for the larger interests of national health. On January 20, 1981, NAP was incorporated in Washington, DC and the following year awarded 501 (c) (3) non-profit status. The first Academy formed was the NAP Psychology Academy. At an historic gala black-tie event at the National Press Club in Washington, DC on August 23, 1982, the first Distinguished Practitioners were inducted into NAP by Founding President Dr. Nicholas Cummings, and Ron Fox, NAP Psychology Chair.

Today, there are 13 NAP academies (Allopathic and Osteopathic Medicine, Audiology, Dentistry, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Podiatric Medicine, Psychology, Social Work, Speech-Language Pathology and Veterinary Medicine) with the opportunity for adding new academies by application. Likewise, NAP's membership now includes six categories to better reflect interprofessional practice, scholarship, and public policy as Distinguished Practitioners, Distinguished Scholars, Distinguished Public Policy Fellows, Professional Members, Associate Members, and Members Emeritus.

Along with Dr. Cumming's leadership legacy as NAP's Founder and first President, he also served in psychology leadership roles as past APA President, university educator, researcher, and practitioner. As a leader and entrepreneur, Dr. Cummings realized that healthcare needed disruption and seized an opportunity to teach behavioral health providers to disrupt an ineffective and fragmented healthcare system from within. At that time, no university existed that was sufficiently innovative to create both the curriculum and the environment that would stimulate the needed transformation in healthcare. In 2014, Dr. Cummings along with his daughter, Dr. Janet L. Cummings, created the Cummings Graduate Institute for Behavioral Health Studies to address educational gaps for innovative and entrepreneurial healthcare professionals wishing to disrupt healthcare from within or launch new ventures. As such, the Cummings Graduate Institute for Behavioral Health Studies is another testament to his remarkable legacy along with his research and clinical practice.

Undeniably, Dr. Nicholas Cummings will be missed by so many for his exceptional leadership, remarkable vision and legacy, and the willingness to disrupt the status quo to better address the needs of society for care at all levels.

Jody Frost