

## 1923-2020: ‘One of the giants of the Academy,’ Dr. Strain dies at age 96

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The only pediatrician to serve the AAP as chapter and district chair, president and executive director, James E. Strain, M.D., FAAP, died on Feb. 4 after a brief illness. He was 96.

Having influenced the AAP’s growth from many perspectives, Dr. Strain lived up to the name of the bronze statue dedicated to him at his 1993 AAP retirement: “The Sky’s the Limit.”

“We lost one of the giants of the Academy,” said AAP President Sara “Sally” H. Goza, M.D., FAAP. “He took the vision he saw when he was president and was able to become executive director and move the Academy ahead. How lucky for us all to see that vision put into reality.”

Dr. Strain often remarked that the Academy is the most effective voice for child health in the United States.



As the Academy’s 53rd president (1982-’83), he guided the organization to advance that role. Major strides were made in securing federal regulations on the care of children with disabilities and provisions to ensure all U.S. children enrolled in Medicaid would have access to an array of preventive and treatment services and benefits.

Dr. Strain had the foresight to see that the AAP would physically outgrow its environment and helped lay the foundation to move the headquarters from Evanston, Ill., to its second home in Elk Grove Village, Ill. As co-chair of the AAP Growth for the Future Campaign, he oversaw the project that raised \$7.2 million to construct the Elk Grove Village office.

He became executive director in 1986 and prioritized advocacy. Two years later, the AAP held its first Legislative Conference.

“He trained pediatricians to be successful advocates. He started that passion for the Academy and helped it grow,” Dr. Goza said.

A true lifelong learner Dr. Strain continued to attend the AAP National Conference into his 90s and stayed involved through the Historical Archives Advisory Committee. (Read his 2015 [oral history](#).)

In 2015, he was promoted to distinguished clinical professor of pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. He previously served as chair of the Clinical Faculty Advisory Committee and was

director of Genetics Services at Denver Children's Hospital.

He also served as chair of the AAP Colorado Chapter, District VIII and numerous committees. He was chair of the American Medical Association (AMA) Section Council on Pediatrics and delegate to the AMA from the Section of Pediatrics. He chaired the National Advisory Commission on Childhood Vaccines and was a senior member of the Institute of Medicine.

Among honors, Dr. Strain received the Clifford Grulee Award (1985), the AAP/AMA Abraham Jacobi Award (1994), the Job Lewis Smith Award (1997) and the Excellence in Public Service Award from the U.S. surgeon general (1998).

Dr. Strain earned his M.D. from University of Colorado, Denver, and completed an internship at Minneapolis General Hospital and residency in pediatrics at Denver Children's Hospital (1948-'50). He served two years in the Army Department of Pediatrics, Fort Carson, Colo., and was in pediatric practice in Denver for most of his career.

He was predeceased by his wife, **Ruby Shepard Strain**, and one son. Three children, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren survive him.

Memorial contributions can be made to the AAP at <http://donate.aap.org> (select honor/memorial option); by mail to AAP Development, P.O. Box 776437, Chicago, IL 60677-6437; or by phone at 630-626-6617. Contributions also can be made to the James E. and Ruby S. Strain Endowment for Radiology at the Children's Hospital Colorado Foundation at <http://www.childrencoloradofoundation.org>.

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