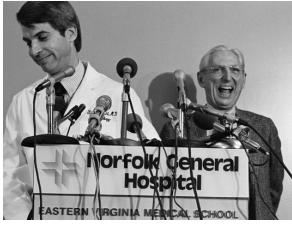


Surgeon Howard Jones, who pioneered IVF, dies at 104



Liz Szabo, USA TODAY

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(Photo: Steve Helber, AP)

Surgeon Howard Jones, who pioneered in vitro fertilization, died Friday at 104.

Jones, who was still writing and active in his field until a recent illness, enjoyed a medical career longer than most people's lives. Although he had a series of triumphs as a surgeon, he became best known for something he achieved at age 70.

In 1981, he and his wife, physician Georgeanna Jones, ushered in the birth of the first baby born through IVF in the USA.

The milestone came three years after the arrival of the world's first "test-tube" baby, [Louise Brown](#), born in England, thanks to the work of British scientist Robert Edwards. The Joneses had worked with Edwards in the 1960s when he visited the [Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine](#) in Baltimore, where they were on the faculty.

Edwards — who won the [2010 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine](#) — credited his time with the Joneses as critical to his success with IVF, in which an egg is fertilized by sperm in a lab dish, then transferred into the womb.

"Dr. Howard, as he was affectionately known, was a towering figure in reproductive medicine," Rebecca Sokol, president of the [American Society of Reproductive Medicine](#), said in a statement. "A talented physician, skilled surgeon, innovative researcher, valued teacher, great writer and a devoted family man. Human beings of his caliber are few and far between."

The Joneses became international spokespeople for the new field of reproductive medicine and were the only American gynecologists invited to advise the pope on IVF.

An estimated 5 million babies have since been born through IVF.

Howard Jones remained professionally active until a recent illness. He regularly reported to work at the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, Va., which was named for him and his wife. He campaigned to expand insurance coverage for IVF, for example, long after he stopped treating patients.

In recent years, the Norfolk institute installed an electronic lift in the stairs leading to his office to accommodate his motorized scooter.

Jones continued to embrace new technology, as well.

In a local TV interview on his 100th birthday, Jones said he would be "lost" without his iPhone.

Last year, Jones published a book, "In Vitro Fertilization Comes to America." At the time of his death, he was working on a book about his wife's accomplishments as a reproductive endocrinologist.

Jones called [Elizabeth Comeau](#), his first IVF baby, every year on her birthday.

"You can't begin to thank the person who brought you into the world," said Comeau, 33. "Beyond being a great scientist, he went to work every day and he loved it. He was so driven. He was at his desk editing his book. He was still going to work. That's why he was so successful."

While at Johns Hopkins, Jones and his wife collaborated to treat a rare condition called congenital adrenal hyperplasia, which causes girls to be born with masculine characteristics. Georgeanna Jones addressed the hormonal causes of the condition, while Howard Jones operated to restore normal genitalia. Among other feats, he created vaginas in girls born without them. Georgeanna Jones' early research into the key hormones of pregnancy laid the groundwork for the home pregnancy tests used today.

Georgeanna Jones went on to become president of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine.



In this May 14, 1998, file photo, Dr. Georgeanna and Dr. Howard Jones, right, pose for a photo in Norfolk, Va. Howard Jones, who pioneered in vitro fertilization in the United States died Friday, July 31, 2015. He was 104. The work of Howard Jones and his late wife, Dr. Georgeanna Jones, at Eastern Virginia Medical School led to the nation's first child born as a result of in vitro fertilization in 1981. Since then, more than 5 million births have stemmed from in vitro fertilization around the world. (Photo: Bill Tiernan, AP)

Howard Jones was also known for his work in cancer, including the establishment of centers to treat cervical cancer. He was one of the doctors who treated cervical cancer patient Henrietta Lacks, the subject of the best-selling book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by [Rebecca Skloot](#). Lacks became famous only after her death for her cells, an "immortal" cell line known to doctors as HeLa, used in research for everything from the polio vaccine to cloning.

When the Joneses retired from Johns Hopkins, they joined the faculty of a fledging medical college in Norfolk, called Eastern Virginia Medical School. A grateful former patient, inspired by Louise Brown's birth in England, wrote the initial check to begin an IVF program in Virginia.

"One thing that people forget is that he did this (IVF) in his retirement," Comeau said. "He retired to Norfolk so he could sail. Instead, he changed the world forever."

Later in life, Howard Jones was a devoted caregiver to his wife, who died of [Alzheimer's disease](#) in 2005 at age 92, after 65 years of marriage. When asked about his greatest accomplishment, on the occasion of his 100th birthday, Jones told a TV reporter that it was "getting Georgeanna to marry me."

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