

# David E. Willett, JD:

## Recipient of the 2012 Distinguished Service Award

*Introductory remarks by R. Lawrence Sullivan Jr., MD*

Last year this House of Delegates voted to recognize a special individual as the recipient of the CSA's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award. Ordinarily this award has gone to a current or retired member of the Society, but this year we come here to honor our highly respected former legal counsel, Mr. David Willett. While Dave is not a CSA member, I think that we can all agree that he has always been "one of us." He becomes the 26th individual so honored, and the third non-physician to receive this award.

Many of you gathered here this evening may not have met or even heard of Dave Willett. In fact, those of us who, in the past, served on the CSA Board of Directors or on the Executive Committee often did not notice he was present because of his unique, quiet manner of being seen but not heard — except when necessary. But whenever the intents or actions of the Board or the Executive Committee crossed the line of legal impropriety, Dave was quick to opine in his soft-spoken yet precise way.



**David E. Willett, JD**

Dave is a native Californian, born in San Francisco, raised on the Peninsula, a graduate of San Mateo High School where, according to one reliable source, he was the smartest kid in the class. Dave graduated from the University of California's Hastings College of Law in 1958 and then served in the United States Navy's Judge Advocate General Corps. Following his four-year tour of duty with the Navy, Dave joined the law firm of Hassard Bonnington in San Francisco, a firm founded by the legendary Hap Hassard, one of the original legal counsels for the California Medical Association. Dave subsequently assumed the role of general counsel for the CMA in

the 1970s. Although the CMA eventually established its own in-house legal department, Dave continued to provide scholarly legal advice and to draft position statements for the CMA on bills before the legislature and proposed state regulatory provisions. In 1996, Dave became legal counsel for the CSA. His amicus briefs on behalf of the CSA and the CMA also reflected a keen knowledge of state and federal laws that impact the practice of medicine.



**Dr. Kenneth Y. Pauker, David E. Willett with the Distinguished Service Award, and Dr. R. Lawrence Sullivan Jr.**

During his illustrious career, Dave also provided counsel to many physician practice groups, hospital medical staffs, component medical societies of the CMA, and numerous specialty societies in California. Recognized nationally for his expertise, he was chosen by his peers to chair the American Society of Medical Association Counsel from 1979 until 1983 and the Health Law Section of the American Bar Association from 1989 until 1991.

Perhaps one of Dave's most unheralded roles was related to the adoption of medical malpractice tort reform in California. In 1975, CSA members proudly participated in what might have been an illegal work stoppage to bring to the public's attention the intolerable increases in malpractice premiums for California's physicians. A special session of the Legislature was called by then Gov. Jerry Brown to resolve the malpractice crisis. After much haggling behind the scenes with representatives of the Legislature, the California Trial Lawyers Association, and the CMA, the historic tort reform bill known as MICRA was signed into law. What most physicians are unaware of is the critical role Dave Willett played in the development of that legislation. For it was Dave who helped to craft and negotiate many of the complex provisions of that legislation, which then became a reasonable and fair approach to resolve medical malpractice claims, and those provisions have since become a model for tort reform in other states.

Those of us who served in leadership positions in the CSA have always appreciated Dave's sage and succinct advice regarding legal matters as well as governance and organizational issues. With Dave at our side, there was also a

sense of comfort and confidence in resolving problems. His regular and timely contributions in the *CSA Bulletin* addressing various practice-management issues have also been invaluable to all anesthesiologists in California. The articles covered many relevant topics such as balance billing, supervision of CRNAs, hospital contracts, the bar to the corporate practice of medicine, managed care, antitrust concerns, and much more.

Dave is now retired from the practice of law and, despite his California roots, lives with his wife, Beth, in Williamsburg, Va., where he stays active doing community volunteer work. Today we are here to recognize and honor a man who not only is admired for a stellar career in the law, but who became a legend in the eyes of many physicians in California. Dave comes across as a soft-spoken and reserved Clark Kent type of man, but he was truly the Superman of lawyers in organized medicine.

Dave, the CSA appreciates and acknowledges the exceptional standards of excellence, dedication, and integrity that your career represents. Physicians throughout California are grateful for your efforts to protect the practice of medicine and especially the specialty of anesthesiology. We thank you for all that you have done.

So I invite all of you to join me in recognizing the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the California Society of Anesthesiologists for 2012, Mr. David E. Willett.

### ***ABA Numbers for Reporting CME Credits!***

CSA will report CME credits earned to the American Board of Anesthesiology. These credits will be counted as Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment activities toward your Maintenance of Certification in Anesthesiology (MOCA) requirement. In order to report these credits, doctors need to provide their ABA number. To obtain an ABA number, visit **[www.theABA.org](http://www.theABA.org)** and create a personal portal account.