

Obituary



JOSEPH LEO DOWLING, JR., MD, passed away on May 12, 2025, at age 98. He was a veteran of the Korean War, a highly distinguished ophthalmologist, an avid supporter of key Rhode Island institutions, and abundantly loved by his family and friends. He will be forever remembered for his impact on medical care and patients, his eternal optimism, his sense of adventure, curiosity and humor, and his devotion to his wife of 63 years, Sarah (Sally) Trenkamp Dowling.

Dr. Dowling graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy, Brown University, and Tufts University Medical School. His time at Brown was particularly impactful and he continued to serve the university throughout his life in various ways including as a member, and then a Trustee Emeritus, of the Corporation, an Associate Professor of Ophthalmology at the medical school (for which he earned a Distinguished Teacher Award), and arguably a record holder for the most Brown athletics games attended. After completing his medical internship at Rhode Island Hospital, he served as a Lt. Medical Corps USNR on board the USS Monrovia (APC 31) in the sixth fleet during the Korean War. He then completed his residency in ophthalmology at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary.

In 1957, he established a private practice in ophthalmology in Providence. Through the combination of his medical skill and business acumen, the practice evolved into the Rhode Island Eye Institute and, upon his retirement at age 90, had grown to include more than a dozen ophthalmologists and optometrists. He was the author of many articles and two book chapters in the medical literature, including an award-winning best paper at the 1960 American Medical Association meeting. With his brother John, he co-authored the book "Vision" published by MIT Press. His medical honors included the Presidency of the New England Ophthalmological Society; Distinguished Alumnus Award from both the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and Harvard Medical School Department of Ophthalmology; and a



Distinguished Service Award from Miriam Hospital. He also served on the Rhode Island Health Services Council and the Board of Medical Licensure and Discipline.

In addition to Brown University, Dr. Dowling was a dedicated supporter, volunteer and fundraiser for many key Rhode Island institutions including Trinity Repertory Company, where he served as Chairman of the Board and received the Charles Sullivan Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts; and Bradley Hospital, where he served as a Trustee and received the Humanitarian of the Year Award. He also served as a Trustee at Butler Hospital and on the boards of Tides Family Services, the Gilbert Stuart Museum, the Dunes Club and the South Ferry Church.

He also enjoyed being a member of many clubs including the Hope Club, the Shop Club, Point Judith Country Club, the Twelfth Night Club and the Clean Plate Club. He loved to travel with Sally and together they visited dozens of countries, from here to Timbuktu.

Dr. Dowling may be gone, but he will never be forgotten. He will be remembered by the Dowling Theater at Trinity Repertory Company, the Dowling Playground at Bradley Hospital, the Dowling Endowed Chair at Brown University and the Dirty Linen Room at the Miriam Hospital.

In addition to his wife Sally, he is survived by his siblings, Professor John E. Dowling (Judith) of Harvard University and his sister Eleanor Kendrick of Cleveland, Ohio and Naples, Florida. He is also survived by his children: Joseph Leo Dowling III (Diana) of Greenwich, Connecticut; Robert Trenkamp Dowling (Stephanie Kim) of New York City; Charles Tappan Dowling (Sophie) of Riverside, Connecticut; and Ruth Tappan Dowling (Bill Young) of Boston, Massachusetts. He is also survived by his grandchildren.

Donations in his memory can be made to Bradley Hospital, 1011 Veterans Memorial Parkway, East Providence, RI 02915. (<https://giving.brownhealth.org/Bradley/Donate>). ❖