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Memorial Service Held in Honor of Stella Chess, M.D. NYU School of Medicine Tribute to Professor of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry



Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D., Director and Founder of the NYU Child Study Center (left) with Kenneth Thomas, Esq., son of the late Stella Chess, M.D. Photo by: Christine Butler*

September 21, 2007 (New York, NY) – New York University School of Medicine held a memorial service Wednesday to honor the life of Stella Chess, M.D., one of the nation’s most eminent child and adolescent psychiatrists. Dr. Chess passed away in March of this year.

Over 100 colleagues, close friends, and family members attended the two-hour ceremony, including Yeou-Cheng Ma, M.D., Assistant Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, who performed three musical violin offerings.

Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D., Director and Founder of the NYU Child Study Center and close friend to Dr. Chess, presided over the ceremony. “Stella was an inspirational teacher, clinician, and researcher,” said Dr. Koplewicz. “One of Stella’s truly amazing qualities was her dedication to teaching the next generation of child and adolescent psychiatrists.”

Colleagues contributed an outpouring of praise, admiration, and nostalgia in their tributes to Dr. Chess. Speakers included Theodore Shapiro, M.D., Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College; Margaret Hertzog, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College; H. Paul Gabriel, M.D., Clinical Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at NYU School of Medicine; Richard A. Oberfield, M.D., Clinical Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at NYU School of Medicine; and William B. Carey, M.D., Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

Kenneth Thomas, Esq., son of Dr. Chess, also paid tribute, offering childhood anecdotes and lauding his mother’s accomplishments as both a parent and a pioneer in child psychiatry.

Dr. Chess attended NYU School of Medicine in 1935 and is one of its most illustrious alumnae. In 1954, she taught at New York Medical College, and in 1966, she returned to the NYU Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital Center, where she founded the first pediatric psychiatry unit. She was Associate Professor of Child

Psychiatry at that time, and in 1970, she became the first appointed Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at NYU.

Together with her husband, Dr. Alexander Thomas, she initiated the landmark New York Longitudinal Study. They carefully observed the behavior of 133 children from infancy to adulthood. Drs. Chess and Thomas theorized that children were born with a unique temperament, a personality from the very moment of their birth. Their breakthrough research challenged earlier notions that psychiatric disorders were the result of defective parenting.

"It was unprecedented, especially studying children who did not have a disease," Dr. Harold Koplewicz said. "Temperament is now taken as a normal convention."

In addition to her research accomplishments, Dr. Chess founded the "Annual Progress in Child Psychiatry and Child Development" series, and she co-authored several books including: "Your Child is a Person: A Psychological Approach to Parenthood Without Guilt" (1965), "The Origin of Personality" (1970), "Know Your Child: An Authoritative Guide for Today's Parents" (1987), and "Goodness of Fit" (1999).

To her last days, Dr. Chess continued to be an active supervisor and member in the NYU Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Stella Chess

Born on March 1, 1914, in Manhattan; died March 14, 2007, in Manhattan; survived by two sons, Richard and Kenneth, six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

*Additional images from the event are available for release.

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NYU Child Study Center

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the understanding, prevention, and treatment of child and adolescent mental health problems. The Center offers expert psychiatric services for children, adolescents, young adults, and families with emphasis on early diagnosis and intervention. The Center's mission is to bridge the gap between science and practice, integrating the finest research with patient care and state-of-the-art training utilizing the resources of the New York University School of Medicine. The goal of the Child Study Center is to bring together the most research-supported evaluations and treatments with an individualized and family centered approach. The Child Study Center was founded in 1997 and established as the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry within the NYU School of Medicine in 2006. For more information, please visit www.AboutOurKids.org.