



Ramon Gustilo, MD
1930-2024

Dr. Ramon Gustilo, a founder of the Orthopaedic Trauma Association (OTA) and a pioneer in orthopaedics throughout his career, passed away peacefully at his home in Minneapolis on December 19, 2024, surrounded by family. He was preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Gloria, who died in late 2023. A beloved father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, Ramon leaves behind 5 children and their spouses, 15 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Ramon was an inspiration to those around the world who had the privilege to know and work with him. His energy and inquisitiveness were infectious, and his contributions to the advancement of orthopaedic care were immeasurable, not only in terms of the academic work that he is well known for but also the significant philanthropic work that he carried out in his homeland of the Philippines.

Ramon was born in Manapla, in the Province of Negros Occidental, Philippines, and grew up on a farm. He was instilled with the value of education by his parents and left home to attend medical school at the University of the Philippines. Seeking further opportunity, he came to the University of Minnesota for residency training in orthopaedic surgery. When he finished, he entered private practice in Minneapolis and supervised residents at Minneapolis General Hospital (later known as Hennepin

County Medical Center, or HCMC). Ramon became the founding chair of the Department of Orthopedics at HCMC and recruited Drs. Richard Kyle, Tom Varecka, and David Templeman to the department. During his long career at HCMC, Ramon established an open fracture classification system, started the first OTA fracture registry, and founded a biomechanics laboratory with Dr. Kyle and Dr. Joan Bechtold, a mechanical engineer, with whom he pioneered the development of cementless hip and knee arthroplasty. Utilizing his open fracture classification system, Ramon contributed other foundational work that improved the understanding of open fractures; developed one of the earliest successful uncemented femoral stems and the first with FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) approval; and published numerous papers defining the concepts of early and late periprosthetic joint infection and treatment outcomes.

Ramon was never satisfied with the status quo and was always looking for ways to do things better. He loved teaching residents, with whom he was very patient, and he was also very gracious with his patients, who loved him. He recognized the benefit of patient-to-patient interaction, and had a weekly group “show and tell” for patients in the physical therapy gym. During a time when it was commonplace for attending surgeons to make rounds in the morning in order to review the work performed by residents during the preceding day and night, legend has it that Ramon came in personally to supervise every open fracture irrigation and debridement regardless of the time of day, teaching the residents that the “I&D” was the most important part of the case. Ramon had a way of making things happen. Those of us who worked with him became accustomed to him putting his arm around our shoulder and knew that, when that happened, a question or a comment would be offered that was always important and insightful, and that whatever was suggested was worth doing. Despite his busy clinical and academic career in the United States, Ramon never forgot his homeland. Ramon taught that whatever wealth a person accumulates above what is needed to care well for their family should be given back to their community. Ramon lived by those words. Throughout his career, he trained fellows at HCMC, including nearly 50 from the Philippines and 25 from Japan, as well as others from the U.S., Europe, South America, and other Southeast Asian countries. Many of Ramon’s fellows have gone on to be orthopaedic leaders in their home countries. In his early 80s, Ramon built a hospital and supporting infrastructure in his hometown of Manapla that was equivalent to hospitals in the U.S. with regard to the standard of care provided. He and his wife established the Ramon and Gloria Gustilo Foundation to support college scholarships for deserving students of Manapla, to provide financial assistance to indigent patients requiring medical and surgical care there, and to provide funding for physical fitness and wellness medical care and research in his home community. Ramon’s work in the Philippines elevated the standard of medical care in his former home and provided hundreds of jobs for the local community.

Ramon's contribution to the founding of the Orthopaedic Trauma Association (OTA) grew from a lunchtime conversation with Drs. Edwin Bovill Jr. and Michael Chapman when Ramon was visiting San Francisco General Hospital in 1977. The discussion focused on the barriers to providing timely and expert fracture care in "county hospitals." These visionary surgeons found a common interest and formed the Orthopaedic Trauma Center Study Group (OTCSG), which continued to grow, becoming the Orthopaedic Trauma Hospital Association and ultimately the OTA. Ramon served as the first OTA president from 1983 to 1984. The OTA has grown to include nearly 3,500 members, including over 500 international members.

Ramon devoted his life to improving the lives of others. During a virtual meeting in September 2024 with his fellows from around the world, he told them (paraphrased), "You all are doing great things. I want you to make sure you do something very important: Be good to others." At his memorial

service in Minneapolis, the priest reflected on conversations he had with Ramon during the last months of Ramon's life, when Ramon asked the priest, "Have I done enough?" We would respond with a resounding "Yes." Ramon leaves behind a legacy of excellence, integrity, mentorship, philanthropy, and unwavering dedication to improving human health through orthopaedics. While we mourn his loss, his memory will remain a guiding light for those of us who were fortunate enough to learn from him and witness his incredible work. Ramon's work will continue to inspire future generations of medical professionals, and, through the Ramon and Gloria Gustilo Foundation, his impact on his home community will endure.

J.B.

R.K.

A.S.

D.T.

T.V.