

2011 George T. Tani, MD Humanitarian Award:
Herbert L. Cantrill, MD

*The most powerful factors in the world are clear ideas
in the minds of energetic men of good will.*

J. Arthur Thomson

A humanitarian is defined as a “caring person – somebody who seeks to improve the lives of other people.” This year’s recipient of the George T. Tani, MD Humanitarian Award, Herbert L. Cantrill, MD, is a true humanitarian in every sense of the word. Through his teaching, volunteer experiences, and clinical research, Dr. Cantrill has dedicated his career to improving the lives of others around the world.

Dr. Cantrill has been described as energetic, intelligent, consistent, and complex. He is guided by a high level of personal and professional integrity, which is conveyed in both the concern for his patients and a life-long commitment to ophthalmology.

He began his teaching career at the University of Minnesota in 1978. His former students describe him as a complete physician, one who cares for the whole person, not just their eyes. He is known for his willingness to go to great lengths for what he feels is best for his patients. When Dr. Cantrill left the University in 1989, he was proud to say he got to personally know all 72 residents who learned there during his tenure. After going into private practice, Dr. Cantrill continued to teach residents and medical students at Regions Hospital, Hennepin County Medical Center, and the Veterans Administration Medical Center.

Dr. Cantrill’s interest in overseas humanitarian work was sparked by two former Tani Award honorees – Drs. Jim Standefer and Marilyn Scudder. In 1995, Dr. Cantrill joined his good friend and mentor, Dr. Standefer, in Costa Rica where they spent a week doing surgery, clinics, and lecturing. With the encouragement of Dr. Scudder, Dr. Cantrill worked through SEE International and went to Africa in 2000. He worked at the Kikuyu Eye Hospital in Nairobi Kenya and at the Eye Specialty Hospital in Dar es Salaam Tanzania. In each setting he worked with local doctors in a skills transfer format. He spent his time working one-on-one with the local doctor in a surgical setting operating on six to eight patients a day. The local doctor performed more and more of each case as the week progressed, until he was eventually performing the entire surgery. In 2004, he went to Vietnam, spending time at the National Eye Hospital in Hanoi and at the Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital in Saigon., using the same skills transfer techniques.

In 2005, Dr. Cantrill returned to the Kikuyu Eye Hospital in Africa with the support of Christian Blind Mission International, an NGO dedicated to supporting long term missionary volunteer work. On his overseas trips, the lack of necessary equipment to do retina surgery limited the number of facilities in which sophisticated retinal surgery could be performed. So, Dr. Cantrill brought along his own surgical equipment and supplies including a laser. Future overseas volunteer trips are currently being planned.

Dr. Cantrill's skills as a clinical researcher are known locally, nationally and internationally. He has been the principle investigator or co-investigator in over 40 clinical trials during his career. His long-standing interest in macular degeneration and retinal vascular disease allowed him to play a significant role in the advances in the management of these diseases over the years. The results of this work have cumulatively resulted in a marked reduction in diabetic blindness and the ability to maintain vision in patients with advanced macular degeneration. Dr Cantrill has been an investigator in many of the important NIH and industry sponsored clinical trials that have led to these remarkable advances.

The George T. Tani, MD Humanitarian Award is given to an individual MAO member for demonstrating a pattern of humanitarian service involving charitable activities, indigent care, and community service. It is with great honor that the MAO presents Dr. Cantrill with the Tani Award for his complete dedication to improving the lives of other people throughout his career.