

Modern Healthcare

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Healthcare pioneer Nelson dies at 86

Stanley Nelson, praised for prescient decisionmaking in running healthcare organizations, died Aug. 3. He was 86.

Nelson was named to Modern Healthcare's Health Care Hall of Fame in 1999 after a career in which he adapted to changes faster than his contemporaries.

Colleagues say one of his most audacious early decisions was to merge two rival hospitals in Minneapolis to form what's now Abbott Northwestern Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in the state. That was in 1967, well before successive waves of healthcare mergers consolidated much of the hospital industry.

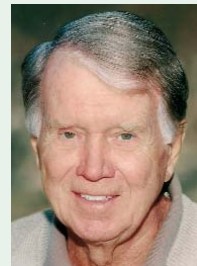
"He had a great vision for what changes needed to be made," said Don Wegmiller, a friend and colleague of Nelson's who formerly served as a top executive at Allina Health, which today owns Abbott Northwestern.

Wegmiller said Nelson personally lobbied Henry Ford to donate \$200 million to expand the ailing Henry Ford Hospital in downtown Detroit by establishing outpatient clinics in outlying communities during the suburban exodus of the 1970s.

"That was, again, unheard of," Wegmiller said. "People said, academic medical centers are downtown. They run a hospital and that's what they do. And Stanley had the vision to say, no, that has to change. And he did it." Nelson was later credited as the "conceptual architect" for the entity known today as Henry Ford Health System.

Nelson also served as a founder of Voluntary Hospitals of America, which eventually became the Irving, Texas-based VHA, and he was chairman of the American Hospital Association in 1982.

In 1993, Nelson and others formed the Scottsdale Institute, a not-for-profit consortium of healthcare organizations that plan and share information on healthcare information technology trends.



Nelson

—Joe Carlson