



THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE
Harvard University

John D. Goodson



Photograph courtesy of Massachusetts General Hospital

John David Goodson was a beloved member of the MGH staff and MGH's Internal Medicine Associates (IMA) for over 50 years—seamlessly knitting together his roles as influential primary care physician, inpatient and outpatient internal medicine attending, creator of the outpatient rotation for all internal medicine residents at MGH, teacher of primary care colleagues in CME courses of his design, mentor, advocate for health care, and innovator in primary care. He died at 76 years of age on February 7, 2026 of complications of ALS.

The Early Years

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, the son and grandson of doctors, he learned early the important values of perseverance, accountability, and building trust with others in the service of their health

care. Growing up in an observant Christian home, he was inculcated with the values of humility, the acceptance of all comers, and a commitment to service. As a Boy Scout and then Eagle Scout, he learned organizational skills and responsibility to those under his wing. All these early life influences, and many others, formed the bedrock of his life and led to his ultimate decision to become a physician of the most responsible type—a primary care doctor of profound purposefulness with a commitment to clinical care, research, education, and advocacy.

John began his educational career in the Kansas City public school system, graduating to attend Washington University in Saint Louis on an academic scholarship. A man of many interests, he transferred soon thereafter to Columbia University, ultimately graduating with a degree in American History as well as completing his pre-med requirements. Before beginning medical school at Stanford, he married Barbara Goodson (nee Dillon), ultimately having three children, divorcing, and later marrying Patricia Willard, a childhood friend from Kansas City.

*In tribute to their dedicated efforts to science and medicine, deceased members of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine (those at the rank of full or emeritus professor) receive a review of their life and contributions with a complete reflection, a **Memorial Minute**.*

An MGH Career

John came to Massachusetts General Hospital in 1975 as an intern to join the newly formed Primary Care Program in the Department of Medicine. His focus was primary care internal medicine from the start, and he was attracted to the new model that required primary care residents to spend 50% of their time in the outpatient setting during training. He did his ambulatory training in the Primary Care Unit, a pod of the IMA configured specifically for training in primary care. After graduation, John joined the IMA and rapidly became a leader in the practice, helping to oversee the transition of the IMA into a teaching practice for all internal medicine residents in the MGH program. At the same time, John took over as director of the MGH Primary Care Program, presiding over a considerable expansion in the number of primary care residents as well as obtaining a federal training grant to support the program. John wanted to have an even greater impact on primary care nationwide. As a result, John co-founded an MGH/Harvard Medical School course, *Primary Care Medicine*, first offered in 1983. He ran the course for many years, and now, 43 years later, this popular course is still going strong under new leadership carrying on in John's tradition. Similarly, John founded another MGH/HMS continuing education course on primary care/general medicine for specialists, and, after two decades of his leadership, the course continues, guided by his spirit. His founding of a course both for primary care internists and of a course on primary care medicine for specialists is symbolic of the collaborative, mutually respectful, complementary, and nonhierarchical partnership at the MGH between primary care doctors and specialists—which John modeled and championed.

While garnering a national reputation for his impact on primary care medicine, John was a dedicated, valued, and respected member of the HMS community. He rose through the academic ranks, and, in 2025, based on his scholarly contributions and his broad impact on the practice of medicine, he was promoted to Professor of Clinical Medicine.

Throughout his career, John practiced adult primary care in the IMA for a large cadre of devoted patients, both as outpatients and inpatients, up until shortly before his passing.

Shaping State and National Policy

John made substantial contributions to health policy. Over a quarter-century ago, his advocacy and community organizing for a ballot initiative were influential in the passage of state-based insurance coverage expansion, making Massachusetts a national leader in the pursuit of universal access to health care. Since those days, John worked tirelessly with policymakers to advance the future of primary care. He was deeply engaged in the accurate valuation of primary care services by the Medicare program and, by extension, other payers nationwide. He was courageous in bringing his passion for primary care to many corners of the policy world, working night and day to put the future of primary care on better footing. In a system full of roadblocks and constraints, John had a unique expertise in moving the policy needle and, indeed, a unique perseverance—he never wavered. He traveled countless times

to Washington, D.C. to meet with federal officials; he wrote research and policy papers; he put time and effort into health policy training and education for early career colleagues through the Society of General Internal Medicine; and he built a community of specialists through founding the Cognitive Care Alliance. All recent national efforts to invest in primary care have roots in John's advocacy and leadership.

Mentorship and Later Years

In the last 10 years of his career, John continued to focus on advancing awareness and advocacy for primary care policy reform that he knew was essential to preserving the foundation of not only primary care but, more generally, health care in the U.S. At the same time, he devoted considerable time to mentoring the next generation of clinical and policy leaders and remained a devoted mentor to MGH residents whom he precepted in clinic at the IMA. His CME courses in *Primary Care Medicine and Updates in General Internal Medicine for Specialists* continued to draw larger audiences during this time, and he carefully prepared for the transition in course leadership to assure that these courses would remain vital components of the Division's educational footprint.

John was a wise and visionary leader in understanding the role of philanthropy in supporting the mission of the primary care program. As he began to wind down his clinical work, the outpouring of support from patients who he had cared for over decades was extraordinary. The giving led to the creation of an endowed chair in health policy for which John served as the first incumbent and is now named in his honor as the John D. Goodson Chair in Health Policy at MGH.

Respectfully submitted,

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