

From Alamo to Jackson Memorial

Written by Paul S. George, BT Contributor
June 2018

A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



The early years of the Miami City Hospital were eventful. The Spanish influenza pandemic sent scores of Miamians to the new facility -- surrounded by Dade County pine trees, with a clear view of the cows grazing nearby -- referred to as the Alamo, for its distant resemblance to its famed namesake in San Antonio.

Later, the killer hurricane of 1926, which hit Miami with winds in excess of 130 miles per hour, resulted in the institution's overworked staff caring for more than 700 of the seriously injured and dying in the Alamo, as well as in a temporary hospital and relief stations elsewhere.

In between these two seminal events was the death of Dr. James Jackson, a beloved figure in the young community, its preeminent physician, a prominent civic leader, and the hospital's first president. A heavy cigar smoker, Jackson had struggled with respiratory problems for some time before he was diagnosed in March 1924 with an inoperable tumor on his lung. He died a month later at age 58. At a special meeting of the Miami City Commission on April 8, 1924, the lawmakers voted to change the name of the hospital to the James M. Jackson Memorial

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Hospital.

By then the hospital had added a nursing school and emergency room. In subsequent years and decades, Jackson Memorial Hospital opened a modern obstetrics room, the city's first cancer detection clinic, and an advanced polio center, featuring eight iron lungs to aid in breathing for the hardest-hit victims.

In 1952, Jackson became the teaching hospital for the nascent University of Miami School of Medicine. Four years later it was the venue for the first open-heart surgery in Florida. In 1960, Jackson Memorial Hospital began offering dialysis for kidney patients, and kidney transplants in 1977. The Ryder Trauma Center opened in 1992, followed by the Holtz Children's Hospital and the path-breaking Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at UHealth/Jackson Memorial.

By then the institution was considered among the top medical facilities in the nation, serving not only Miami-Dade residents but also large numbers of patients from Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to providing care at its sprawling main campus, Jackson Health System, as it is now known, has taken its services to distant parts of the county. Yet its mission remains the same: providing high-quality care for every patient.

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