I want to start by thanking God for the blessing of Robert A. Copeland, Jr. M.D., for having had the opportunity to know him and for the realization that even in the great sadness we are experiencing right now, we may find some comfort in knowing that he is indeed still here in every heart and mind that he has touched.

Dr. Copeland has a habit of knick-naming all of our residents. And, your name can come about from a funny incident or from a resemblance between you and a well-known person or medical condition, or from careful study of your character. All of our current residents have nicknames, and I want to share their reflection on what Dr. Copeland has meant to them and tell you their names:

Dr. Copeland... Always left his office door open, always had something to say, always had a heart-felt laugh, always made Monday’s fun, always started lecture at 7:00 AM, always an advocate, always an academic, always talked about his boys and his princess, always remembered everybody’s name (and often mispronounced them), always wanted an Arnold Palmer, tazo tea, and philly cheesesteak, always rooted for the Cowboys, always stopped at Chick-fil-A, always gave away wizards tickets, always had a knick name for everybody, always had our back, always asked about the wobble-wobble, always played “It’s 5 oc’clock somewhere”....always put a smile on your face.

Dr. Copeland... Never was in a bad mood, never allowed us to skip breakfast, never let us
miss an opportunity, never wore dungarees, never got his new laptop or his new phone, never liked our photography, never called off sick, never went home early, never organized his desk, never passed on barbeque, never passed on travel, never missed whale watching, never let us settle for less than the best.

Dr. Copeland... You will always be remembered, and will never be replaced. With love, The Ninja, Usi-Doosie, Shinaway-Shinaway, Tex-Mex, The Horror, Nadal, Pablo Escobar, Bubble-Two, and Persian Princess.

Personally, I have known Dr. Copeland, Bob, Bobby, Cope, Robert for 20 years, and all the iterations of his name I have just used have paralleled all the amazing roles he has played in my life. I first met him as a medical student that he selected for his residency program. He was then Dr. Copeland, the Chief of the Division of Ophthalmology. As a teacher, he always demanded excellence, hard work, and that we residents practice with skill and compassion. He would always say “trust your training and get the job done”. He taught me, indeed all of his residents some amazing life lessons as well (Knowing his parents, Joy and Edgar, I know that these were lessons they taught him well): he was never afraid to express his faith and he always taught the value of establishing good relationships with everyone no matter their station in life or role on the health care team.

His leadership style could be described as “open door”, he was always accessible to listen to any problem or idea. His enthusiasm and passion for Ophthalmology was infectious, and we all learned so much.

Next, to me, he was Dr. Copeland the Champion. As his chief resident, I had a ring-side seat to his fight to make the division a department. He fought so hard to accomplish this feat despite so many people telling him he couldn’t do it or it wasn’t worth doing. In January of 2000, he was finally successful, and he became our founding Chairman.

You may know that a resident’s ability to get a great fellowship or job after training has a large part to do with the references from the Chairman of the program, the phone calls he makes on your behalf. He backed me to get a prestigious glaucoma fellowship, which opened so many doors for me to become the professional and person I am today. Indeed, many of his students and residents will tell you a similar story.

At the end of my training, he had a job waiting for me, and four years into that job he made me the residency program director. He guided me and protected me,
continued to mentor me every step of the way. In our department, we always refer to each other as Dr. Jones or Dr. Smith, Dr. Pappas or Dr. Phillpotts, as a sign of respect not entitlement. Dr. Copeland always said once you pass your board certification exam on the first attempt, you could call him Bob. So, he became Bob to me and together for the past 15 years we worked to improve the residency program and to teach our trainees to respect the privilege of being an ophthalmologist and to take care of our patients. Over these years we have attended countless meetings, given many lectures, written papers and book chapters, celebrated the many successes of our residents, traveled the world learning from others and serving where there was great need.

Over these years, Bob has become “Bobby” and “Cope” as I have seen him through the eyes of his children reflecting a profound love and joy that he found in building a life with his remarkable wife, Candie. Through her eyes, he has become “Robert” to me too.

I’ve share with you my and Bob’s story, and have used some of the reflections from countless trainees of Bob who have reached out to me and to their program in support, demonstrating the amazing, transformative role Dr. Copeland has played in their lives as teacher, mentor, champion, friend. I am so thankful for all of their support and their commitment to make sure his vision lives.

So in tribute to Bob, I can say he was truly remarkable a champion for Howard University, for African-Americans, for people of color in Ophthalmology both in the United States and around the world, having trained more African-American ophthalmologist than any other Chairman in the history of the United States.

Bob always answered the call of Christ! As said in John chapter 21 verse 16: Again Jesus said “Peter son of John, do you love me? He answered “Yes Lord, you know that I love you”. Jesus said “Take care of my sheep”. And that is what Bob, Bobby, Cope, Robert, has done. He has taken care of all of us, from his patients, students, residents, faculty, colleagues, family, church members and our community.

For this I will be grateful to him forever.

Leslie S. Jones, M.D.

To recognize and honor Dr. Copeland's many contributions to his patients, to his trainees, to Howard University, and to his community, the Robert A. Copeland, Jr. M.D. Endowed Chair has been established with Howard University.

All checks and money orders can be written to Howard University and sent to:

Howard University  
C/O Ms. Laura Jack  
2225 Georgia Avenue, NW Suite 901  
Washington, DC 20059  
(Please include "Dr. Copeland Fund" in the memo.)

Alternatively, gifts may be made in his honor online at www.howard.edu/give. Select "Other Designation" and in "Other Fund Description" field, please enter "Dr. Copeland Fund."

For more information about the Endowed Chair, please do not hesitate to contact me: (202) 865-3302 or l_s_jones@howard.edu.