



The Medical Doctors of *Star Trek*: Leonard “Bones” McCoy and Beverly Crusher

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The *Star Trek* fictional universe was created in 1966 by producer and screenwriter Gene Roddenberry (1921-1991). While the original *Star Trek* television series ran for only 3 seasons, those 79 original episodes became touchstones of popular culture and spun off several other television programs and numerous feature-length films.

The dazzling medical technology of the *Star Trek* universe includes devices that are now in development in the real world, such as non-invasive diagnostic equipment, a hypodermic spray that allows parenteral injection of medications without needles, and prosthetics such as the visor that allows Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge, a congenitally blind character, to see. Despite remarkable technological advantages, the Starfleet spacecraft in the *Star Trek* universe still require physicians (usually human) to care for the sick and injured.

Leonard “Bones” McCoy, who was played by actor DeForest Kelley in the original *Star Trek* series and by Karl Urban in the 2009 reboot film *Star Trek*, was born in Atlanta in January 2227, and attended the University of Mississippi. In 2266, he was posted to the original *USS Enterprise* as chief medical officer. Despite his use of the medical equipment available on the *Enterprise*, he maintained a general suspicion of technology. His emotional and volatile nature was in contrast to the coolly rational temperament of the *Enterprise*'s first mate, Mr Spock. In 1968, Roddenberry commented on this relationship: “We simply didn’t realize how much the fans loved the bickering between our Arrowsmith [McCoy] and our Alien [Spock].”

In the original 1966-1969 television series, McCoy’s nickname “Bones” derived from the old humorous term for a surgeon, “sawbones,” and was bestowed on him by Captain James T. Kirk. In the 2009 *Star Trek* film, McCoy and Kirk were friends at Starfleet Academy when

McCoy described a recent painful divorce that left him with “nothing but bones.” In one *Star Trek* episode, McCoy married a priestess of the planet Yonada, and in another episode he mentioned a daughter, Joanna. In the 1982 *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* film – widely considered the best of the initial film series – Spock transferred his mental patterns into McCoy just before dying (they were transferred back in a subsequent film). In *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, McCoy performed physician-assisted suicide on his father just before a cure was found for his father’s condition, causing him considerable guilt. Eventually McCoy ascended to the rank of Admiral. He was well known for two catchphrases: “He’s dead, Jim!” (to describe medical futility); and “I’m a doctor, Jim, not a ... [torpedo technician, astrophysicist, etc]” (to emphasize the limited scope of his expertise whenever Kirk asked him non-medical questions).

Commander Beverly Crusher *née* Howard, the chief medical officer of *USS Enterprise-D* and *Enterprise-E*, was played by Gates McFadden in the 1987-1994 television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. She was born on the moon (“Luna”) in Copernicus City on October 13, 2324, and raised by her grandmother Felisa – a traditional healer with expertise in medicinal herbs – on a colony planet, Arvada III, after her parents died. When Arvada III became uninhabitable, the shy, studious, red-haired Beverly and her grandmother settled on Caldos II. Beverly eventually attended Starfleet Academy from 2342-2350, where she met and married another cadet, Jack Crusher. Their only son, Wesley Crusher, who eventually became a Starfleet engineer, was born during his mother’s final year at the academy. Beverly Crusher raised Wesley alone after her husband was killed in the line of duty when Wesley was 5 years old. After Jack Crusher died, she and Captain Picard of the *Enterprise-D* developed romantic feelings for one another. She

From Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA (D.P.S.); and Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN (R.A.K.).



was posted to the *Enterprise-D* in 2364 at Fairpoint Station together with Wesley, and the romantic tension between Crusher and Picard formed a plot element of many subsequent episodes.

Small nations with a liberal philatelic issue policy often offer stamps on popular culture themes such as Elvis Presley, Princess Diana, or Disney characters in order to earn money from international topical collectors. The Palau issue of 2008 — honoring Dr Crusher and other characters on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* — could be considered an example of this

“philatelic wallpaper,” since Dr Crusher had no connection with Palau. However, the Palau issue (Scott 946d) was at least officially licensed as nations in the developing world often do not obtain copyright. Dr McCoy was honored philatelically by Canada in 2016, celebrating 50 years of *Star Trek*, and at least here there was a connection: *Enterprise-A* engineer Mr Scott was Canadian, as is the actor who originally played Kirk, William Shatner. Numerous other nations have issued *Star Trek*-themed stamp sheets that include images of McCoy.