Obituary

Fraser Sweatman, 1913–1991

The community of anaesthesia lost a good friend and proponent in the death of Fraser Sweatman in May of this year. The post-war generation of anaesthetists, trained from 1945 to 1955 will recall the serious defects in the equipment of the period. These included inaccurate flowmeters, the capability of delivering oxygen-free mixtures and uncontrolled vapour concentrations. The absence of gas monitors, efficient ventilators, circulation monitors and alarm-systems with the prevalence of explosive anesthetic agents added further problems. The control of vapour concentration became even more crucial with the advent of halothane in 1955 as the ease and hazards of overdosage were apparent very soon, due to attempts to deliver halothane from ether vaporizers.

Fraser entered the medical supply industry in 1947 and joined Ohio Medical in 1954. In 1955, he took over North American distribution of the fluotec vaporizer and subsequently purchased the manufacturing company, Cyprane Ltd. He developed the Quantiflex Gas Machine incorporating the first twin-series (high-low) flowmeter system with protection against oxygen-failure and the now-standard position of oxygen downstream of all other gases.

A turning point in safe practice came with the development by his engineers of the MDM system, designed to prevent (rather than detect), the delivery of hypoxic mixtures. This system rapidly found favour as an addition to existing gas machines. He also developed a pin-index system for vaporizers and the Selectatec system to exclude all but one vapour.

In addition to his role in advancing safe practice in anaesthesia, he was a participant in establishing the mutual fund of the CAS, with Dr. R.A. Gordon and others. He was faithful in attending CAS meetings, where he was always available to discuss equipment problems. Good humour, enthusiasm, integrity, perseverance and vision were prominent in his personality and enabled him and his staff to revolutionize the way in which anaesthesia was practiced only 30 years ago.

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