Book & New Media Reviews

American Society of Anesthesiologists: A Century of Challenges and Progress

Douglas R. Bacon, Kathryn E. McGoldrick, Mark J. Lema (Eds). Park Ridge, IL: The Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, 2005. \$55.00 US/hardcover. ISBN 1-889595-15-2

Canadian anesthesiologists are greatly indebted to American anesthesiology, and to the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) in particular. The journal *Anesthesiology*, and the ASA annual meeting, for example, have been of incalculable benefit to anesthesiologists in Canada as elsewhere, while the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology has unique value to the specialty as a whole. It is entirely appropriate that the ASA has published a history to celebrate its centennial and that this be available to Canadian readers.

The ASA history covers all significant aspects of the Society's development.

Its achievements are impressive. Just the growth of the Society is remarkable: from the nine "young men" at an inaugural meeting in New York on October 6, 1905, to the 35,517 women and men as of December 31, 1999. The ASA members have had to deal with both the progress and numerous challenges of the past century. More readers will be familiar with the former issues which confronted the specialty rather than the latter, the degrees of which are indicated by some of the chapter subtitles: the 'turmoil' of the 1950s, the 'crisis' of the 1970s, the 'upheaval' of the 1980s, and the 'growing pains' of the 1990s. Some of the challenges were external: the constraints of state and federal statutes and regulations, for example; some were internal: the relationship between the former American Society of Anesthetists and the International Anesthesia Research Society, and the even more problematic and contentious (and ongoing) relationship between the ASA and the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. All organizations are works in progress, and a history is essential for those who will have to face equally significant progress and challenges ahead.

Writing an institutional history is itself a challenge. While most of the questions relating to an organization have been answered here, some minor deficiencies remain. One is suggested by the observation by Eugene Sinclair in the Foreword that this history is

a "collection of articles." The history is the work of no fewer than 20 authors, which makes it difficult for a holistic approach as well as literary homogeneity. On the other hand, some chapters stand out as a result: the carefully documented chapter on the New York Society of Anesthetists by Doug Bacon and the charming and felicitous vignette of the Wood Library-Museum by George Bause are two examples.

No Canadian reader will be surprised at some laxity in Canadian references. Though it has to be accepted that this is essentially a history of an American organization, Wesley Bourne, the one-time doyen of North American anesthesiology, is not mentioned as an ASA president (nor, surprisingly, is there any list of ASA presidents and officers). The Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society itself rates no more than passing mention, despite the close connection between American and Canadian anesthesiologists in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada is incorrectly referred to on page 141.

Despite these minor limitations, the editors must be congratulated on a significant achievement, and one that will point the way for historians who wish to know more about the development of anesthesiology in the United States.

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