History of Canadian Anaesthesia

Wesley Bourne (1886–1965)

The first autonomous university department of anaesthesia in Canada was founded at McGill in 1946 and the appointment of Dr. Wesley Bourne as Chairman recognized his academic achievements and stature. By then he had been an anaesthetist and pharmacology lecturer for 25 years.

He was a productive investigator, with over 100 publications, who saw beyond the technical limits of anaesthesia. He was Secretary of the original Canadian Society of Anaesthetists (1921–7) and suggested its Greek motto, *Katheudontas parateroumen* (We watch closely those who sleep). He won the British Journal of Anaesthesia Award for the best essay, the Hickman Medal of the Royal Society of Medicine and the first Gold Medal of the Canadian Anaesthetists' Society. He was twice President of the International Association of Anaesthetists (1925 and 1940), Vice-President of the Section of Anaesthesia of the Canadian Medical Association (1932) and the only non-American President of the American Society of Anesthesiologists (1942). In recognition of his services to anaesthesia he received a silver loving cup from Dr. Francis H. McMechan, who alluded to him as a "builder of bridges to the coming generation of anaesthetists."

Who was the man who was to change anaesthesia education in Canada? He grew up in Barbados in an Anglican family with ancestry linked to an indentured servant from England. Greek and Latin, taught at the Lodge School, embellish many of his articles. It is not clear why he chose anaesthesia. He entered McGill Medical School in 1907, and remained in Montreal for the rest of his career. He had started surgical training with Edward A. Archibald, the "Father of Thoracic Surgery," when Dr. F. Willard Nagle solicited his help to give anaesthetics. Despite writing on "The teaching of anaesthesia to medical students" and "What constitutes an efficient anaesthesia service for a hospital," he disagreed with salaried appointments and refused the position of Chief of Anaesthesia at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Wesley Bourne's career spanned two World Wars. With Drs. Harold R. Griffith and M. Digby Leigh he formed the Great Triumvirate of the 1940s. They were commissioned as consultants to the armed forces for the systematic training of medical officers in anaesthesia. Teaching was based on the two-year graduate course started in the Montreal hospitals in 1940, which later evolved into the formalized Diploma Course and residency training programme of the post-war McGill department. He represented his department internationally, attending the Centenary of Anaesthesia in Britain in 1946. The Faculty of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland elected him to a fellowship two years later and in 1950, French-Canadian anaesthetists presented Wesley Bourne with his portrait, which today hangs in the McGill Department. When the Anaesthetists' Travel Club became the Academy of Anesthesiology (1954), dedicated to "foster and encourage the advancement of the arts and science of anesthesiology," Wesley Bourne was a charter member.

In his retirement year (1951), there were 490 whole or part-time anaesthetists in Canada. Within three decades Wesley Bourne had seen the specialty develop from only eight Canadian anaesthetists (Drs. W. Bourne, G.M. Geldert, T.R. Hanley, W.G. Hepburn, W.B. Howell, S. Johnston, C. LaRocque and F.W. Nagle). The Canadian Anaesthetist's Society was active and within three years would have its own journal. The Fellowship in Anaesthesia was introduced in 1951, and the Certification for specialist anaesthetists of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in 1971; recognition for his specialty of which Wesley Bourne would have approved.

Although active in the World Health Organization in Paris and at the inception of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists, poor health dogged Wesley Bourne's latter years. His collected works were published as a book "Mysterious Waters to Guard" in 1954. One year after his death, annual Memorial Lectures were initiated at McGill. With the establishment of an Endowed Chair in Anaesthesia in 1990, the first in Canada, the memory of Wesley Bourne is preserved.

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