Historical Musings

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As we arrive at the centennial of the establishment of the Lahey Clinic in 1923, it is only natural to reflect on the many historical contributions by those who established the Clinic and then participated in the development of an internationally renowned multispecialty health care system devoted to providing comprehensive quality care to the myriad of patients seen and treated since its inception. Some of the stories have been promulgated in many forums; these include the surgical treatment of Sir Anthony Eden, the prime minister of England, by Dr. Richard Cattell, and the evaluation of Franklin Delano Roosevelt prior to seeking his fourth term by Dr. Frank Lahey. Many other stories reside in more obscure places, since (unfortunately) there is no definitive history of the Lahey Clinic. There are three books that recount parts of this history: On the Cutting Edge. A Great American surgeon: Richard B. Cattell, M.D. by Mary Virginia Cattell Dunmore. Jones River Press, Plymouth, MA, 1991; The Knife that Saves. Memoirs of a Lahey Clinic Surgeon by Herbert D. Adams, M.D. Watson Publishing International, Canton, MA, 1990; and Lahey Clinic: From Boston to Burlington by Robert E. Wise, M.D. Robert E. Wise MD Research and Education Institute, Burlington MA, 2013. Each of these are available in the Cattell Memorial Library.

Publication was considered an essential part of building the respect for and reputation of the Clinic. Even though the Clinic opened in 1923, the first publication of a Lahey volume of Surgical Clinics of North America (volume 4 number 6) was in 1924, only one year later. All of the initial founding members of the Clinic are represented in the authorship, including three articles by Dr. Howard Clute, who was the first surgeon hired by Dr. Lahey and one of the founding members, and who subsequently went on to become the chief of surgery at Boston University. This relationship with Surgical Clinics continued for many years. Along with the Mayo Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic, the Lahey Clinic produced a volume nearly annually for over thirty-five years.

As this is the inaugural issue of The Lahey Journal it is well to remember that there is also an institutional precedent for this sort of activity. Thanks to Carol Spencer, the librarian of the Clinic and the repository of much of the important historical information that exists today, in the past there was a Lahey Clinic Bulletin, begun in 1938, with about one issue every two years. In 1964 the name was changed to the Lahey Clinic Foundation Bulletin with four issues per year until 1983 (volume 32) when publication stopped. From 1945 to 1970 the Bulletin was indexed in Medline; apparently the indexing stopped due to the fact that articles previously published in Medical and Surgical Clinics were reproduced in the Bulletin and thus did not represent original work.

This issue of The Lahey Journal contains a delightful article by Adam Lipworth, the chair of Allergy and Dermatology, about Sam Moschella, the former Chair of that Department who died peacefully, surrounded by family, four months after his 101th birthday on August 21, 2022. By all accounts, he was one of the great clinicians and educators in the history of the Clinic; in fact, the Educator of the Year award, presented annually to a Lahey educator, was named in his honor to acknowledge his overwhelming longitudinal commitment to the education of patients, students, residents, fellows and practicing physicians. Some of us are of sufficient age to have shared patients with Sam and to have been awed by his clinical acumen and ceaseless teaching. It is hoped that other staff members will be stimulated to make similar presentations about individuals in their divisions and departments.

As important historical figures retire we are in danger of losing our appreciation for the rich history of the Lahey Clinic. Compilation of a truly comprehensive history is a daunting task for any single individual. Some Departments in the past...
have presented histories of their own Departments or sections, but these would need to be identified and updated. Perhaps this task could be accomplished by each individual section utilizing available materials and perhaps incorporating the digitized formal portraits that are available and have been sorted by department with their years of service to the Clinic. An editorial board could be appointed to oversee and direct such a project. If the history of the Lahey Clinic is to be memorialized, in my opinion this would be the type of template that could actually accomplish it. In the meantime, efforts such as those of Dr. Lipworth should be encouraged and published in The Lahey Journal.