

Histories of our Professions

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Using medicine as the primary exemplar, Flexner found that professions involve personally responsible intellectual activity; they derive their material immediately from learning and science; they possess an organized and educationally communicable technique; they have evolved into definite status, social and professional; and they tend to become, more and more clearly, organs for the achievement of large social ends.

Sullivan WM. Commentary: Expanding Flexner's legacy through new understanding. *Academic Medicine* 2010;85:200-1.

Bryce Weir has provided a *tour de force* of the history of neurosurgery in Canada¹ in this issue of the *Journal*.¹ He writes from a deeply personal perspective and is not shy in sharing his opinions. (Hopefully not too many Letters-to-the-Editor will follow.) He places the history of neurosurgery in the context of time, world and current events that have helped to shape the profession. Dr. Weir is well qualified as a credible historian of neurosurgery in Canada: he knew many of the important players or individuals who were trained first hand by the founders; he learned, worked, taught and inspired others in this difficult and demanding profession. He also achieved prominence in Canada and internationally for his work in vascular neurosurgery. He knows the profession well and compiled a history that is detailed yet alive and bristling with interesting personalities, sayings and anecdotes. Weir also gives his perspectives on the current and future state of neurosurgery and medicine in general in Canada. It is a considered review and deserves our attention and respect.

Similarly, Dr. H.J.M. Barnett has contributed his memoirs, which capture the early years and subsequent development of neurology in Canada, again in the context of a complex, changing world.²⁻⁵ Admittedly these are perspectives of one man, but a giant in Canadian neurology -- one who has witnessed much of the development of his profession in Canada and internationally.

As Editor of the *CJNS* I feel it is important to capture our history from those who pass on the art and science of our neurosurgical, neurological and allied neurological specialties (neuropathology, neuroradiology, neuroanesthesia, clinical neurophysiology and the areas related to translational neuroscience) to generations of trainees. We have a rich tradition of knowledge and skill sets and we should know their sources. Having knowledge of where we have come from and how we have evolved up to now will help, I hope, give guidance to the future. We should be involved in the profession of our specialty, as Dr. Weir and Dr. Barnett have been, and speak our mind about how we see things developing and do what we can to shape a better future for our profession and our patients. As Patrick Hazard has written, "History in our kind of society is not a luxury but a necessity."⁶

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3. Barnett HJM. More personal reflections on life - part III: The launch of a journey lasting 65 years: personal observations made from a front-row seat at the greatest show on earth. *Can J Neurol Sci.* 2010;37(2):160-6.
4. Barnett HJM. My front row seat – part IV: further encounters at the greatest show on earth. *Can J Neurol Sci.* 2010;37(5):562-7.
5. Barnett HJM. My front row seat – Part V: further encounters at the greatest show on earth. *Can J Neurol Sci.* 2011;38(2):220-4.
6. Hazard P. *Broad Street Review.* (on-line journal) Aug 2010.