The Canadian Contribution to Obstetric Anesthesia

Abstract Type: Other
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The earliest contributions to Obstetric Anesthesia in Canada are probably attributed to the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg (St. Boniface Hospital) with Diane Biehl and Sol Shnider, where the pioneer work on the pregnant sheep model was conceived, and later developed to full extent at the University of California in San Francisco. Richard Pahlaniuk was later contributor to this group.

The University of British Columbia and the Grace Hospital in Vancouver, currently Women’s Hospital and Health Center, were perhaps one of the foremost contributors to Obstetric Anesthesia in Canada. Jean Hugill, Graham McMorland, Joanne Douglas and Roanne Preston have sustained, over decades, a successful fellowship and clinical research program. In addition to their academic roles, they have served in leading positions at the CAS, SOAP, and WFSA. Other leading names emerged at Grace Hospital, such as David Gambling, Chantal Crochetiere and John Fuller. The book “Obstetric Anesthesia and Uncommon Diseases”, co-edited by David Gambling and Joanne Douglas, was conceived in Canadian soil.

Philip Bromage, at the McGill University in Montreal, introduced epidurals to Quebec and popularized the technique globally, through his research and teaching, and his internationally acclaimed textbook on “Epidural Anesthesia”. Sally Weeks was a major inspiration to clinicians at the Royal Victoria Hospital and Chantal Crochtiere, who joined the Ste Justine Hospital in Montreal upon completion of her fellowship in Vancouver, led the French speaking Canada in our subspecialty.

Eastern Canada contributed profusely to Obstetric Anesthesia. Hilary Taylor gave a significant contribution to the subspecialty despite working in a non-academic environment. Desmond Writer at the Dalhousie University (Salvation Army-Grace Maternity Hospital) has contributed most to Obstetric Anesthesia in Nova Scotia.

In Saskatchewan, most recently, David Campbell has nurtured the interest in Obstetric Anesthesia, both in research and clinical practice.

Lastly, in Ontario, Women’s College Hospital and Mount Sinai Hospital, both affiliated to the University of Toronto, have been the leading institutions. Steven Halpern and Steven Rolbin have made significant contributions in both clinical research and teaching. A special interest in evidence-based medicine was developed by Steven Halpern, culminating with the publication of the book “Evidence Based Obstetric Anesthesia”, co-edited by Joanne Douglas. Pam Morgan and co-workers have implemented the first projects using simulation in the teaching of team work in Obstetrics. More recently, Mount Sinai Hospital has established itself as a leading academic teaching and research center, with the work of Jose Carvalho, Alison Macarthur, Mrinalini Balki and others. Not only a very active fellowship program has been established, but cutting edge research has been developed in the areas of uterine contractility and spinal ultrasound among others.