

CNSS Summer Newsletter, 2010

45th Annual Congress of the CNSF, June 8 – 11, Quebec City

The CNSF Scientific and Professional Development Committees, on which **Loch Macdonald, Eric Massicotte, Ron Pokrupa, Derek Fewer, Dhany Charest and Shobhan Vachhrajanni** represent the CNSS, put together another outstanding program for neurosurgeons at this year's Congress. Highlights included a popular neurosurgery resident review course on neurovascular disease (introduced into the program this year), an outstanding Penfield lecture given by **Dr. James Rutka** (Chair of the Division of Neurosurgery, University of Toronto) entitled "Recent Advances in Pediatric Epilepsy Surgery: Penfield Would be Proud", and guest lecturers **Stephan Mayer** (Director of the Neurological Intensive Care Unit at the New York – Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center) and **Ziya Gokaslan** (Director of the Spine Program, Vice-Chairman and Donlin M. Long Professor of Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins) who both spoke at the CNSS plenary session. A dynamic neurointensivist, accomplished researcher and spectacular speaker, Dr. Mayer discussed the evolution of neurointensive care and monitoring of the comatose brain: past, present and future. Dr. Gokaslan, internationally preeminent in his field of aggressive spinal surgery for neoplasia, provided a richly illustrated lecture on simply astonishing surgical techniques he has developed for spinal column tumours.

The CNSS plenary session was also the occasion of our Society's Lifetime Achievement Award presentation to **Charles Haskell Tator CM, MD, PhD, FRCSC** (Former Campeau Family/Dr. C.H. Tator Chair, University of Toronto). The presentation speech, which was accompanied by various recent and old photographs of Dr. Tator, friends, colleagues and crew, is appended to this newsletter for those of you who could not be present at the ceremony.

The Congress featured our Society's McKenzie Prize winners for basic and clinical neurosurgical research conducted by a neurosurgical resident, and this year's winners were:

- Co-Winner in Basic Research. – **John Kelly**, University of Calgary: "Oligodendroglioma cell lines containing t(1;19)(q10;p10)"
- Co-Winner in Basic Research. - **Scellig Stone**, University of Toronto: "Augmenting adult hippocampal neurogenesis using targeted brain stimulation: implications for memory networks"
- Winner in Clinical Research - **Roberto Diaz**, University of Calgary: "Efficacy and active ingredients in an epidural analgesic paste after lumbar decompression: a prospective randomized double-blind controlled trial"

The CNSS thanks the McKenzie Prize Adjudication Committee and especially it's Chair, **John Wong** (University of Calgary), for their efforts judging the submissions.

The Congress featured many other great neurosurgical courses and lectures, including "What's New in Neurosurgery" organized and chaired by **Pascale Lavoie**, the always popular "Grand Rounds" where **Genevieve Milot** assisted with the neurosurgical case, and there were many opportunities to drop in to concurrent neurological, neurocritical care, neurointerventional, electrophysiology and child neurology sessions. The Distinguished Guest Lecturer for the Congress this year was **Dr. James Orbinski**,

recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the Medecins Sans Frontiers in 1999. His lecture was a compelling examination of the ravages of genocide and civil war and the role of humanitarianism, and it was a talk that was both humbling and inspiring.

The 46th Congress will be held in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia, June 14th to 17th 2011, so please plan on being there for another outstanding educational opportunity.

CNSS Business

For those of you who could not join us for the AGM held on Thursday, June 10th, the meeting minutes and my President's Report, will be made available on the CNSF website on the CNSS page. Contact Donna in MemberServices if you require your username and password. donna-irvin@cnsfederation.org. A few items of note; Stepping down, with our gratitude for past service, were several provincial councilors, replaced as follows in the council membership list:

- Quebec – **Genevieve Milot**
- Nova Scotia – **Daniel McNeely**, replaced by **Simon Walling**
- Newfoundland/Labrador – **Gerry Murray**, reappointed to another term
- Alberta – **Richard Fox**, replaced by **Walter Hader**
- British Columbia – **Kim Lefevre**
- Saskatchewan – **Joe Buwembo**
- New Brunswick – **Dhany Charest**, replaced by **Najmedden Attabib**
- Ontario – **Kesava Reddy**, replaced by **David Steven**
- Manitoba – **Neil Berrington**, replaced by **Patrick McDonald**

As discussed in my President's Report, the CNSS made another formal, written appeal to the American Board of Neurological Surgery this spring to reconsider their 1998 decision that graduates of Canadian neurosurgical programs would no longer be eligible to sit their examinations (the letter sent by myself and **Gary Redekop**, Chair of the Royal College Specialty Committee for Neurosurgery, is appended to this newsletter for your interest). As of the time of the writing this newsletter, we have not had an official response, however AANS president-elect **Jim Rutka** (who has made potent efforts on our behalf "behind the scenes") informed the AGM that our appeal has been received and he believes there is reason to be hopeful that the decision will be reconsidered in the near future. So while nothing is certain, there is at least a sense of optimism that the ABNS will reconsider Canadian eligibility for their certification examinations.

Shobhan Vachhrajani, a dynamic and talented young man who has done an outstanding job as resident representative to the CNSF Board, will continue on in his position, and I will have ended my term as president spelling his last name differently every single time I have typed it (earlier in this newsletter you saw the Italian version).

CNSS executive is being taken over by **Chris Wallace**, President, **Brian Toyota** Vice-President, and **Ian Fleetwood**, Secretary-Treasurer. Let me take this opportunity to remind you that the Chair of the Royal College Examination Committee for neurosurgery is my friend **John Hurlbert**, and I especially thank him for taking on this huge and important job. We all thank the entire examination committee (you know who you are) for their efforts.

Farewell

It has been a privilege to serve Canadian neurosurgery as part of the CNSS executive. I strongly believe that our organization is important and relevant in our professional lives. I hope that you will continue to attend and support our Congress as it is the lifeblood of the CNSF and our financial sustainability. You also learn things and get valuable MOC hours for attending, and support our residents who take advantage of the Congress to present their scientific research.

Gone but not forgotten, I will now serve the CNSF as one of the Vice-Presidents, along with Derek Fewer President, John Stewart Vice-President and Garth Bray Executive Vice-President.

I will finish by expressing my gratitude to the Secretariat staff of the CNSF who have endured and supported me during my term: **Dan Morin** (CEO), **Marika Fitzgerald** (Finance and Administration Manager), **Donna Irvin** (Membership Services Coordinator) and **Brett Windle** (Corporate Development Coordinator). They are a super group who are more important to Canadian neurosciences and neurosurgery than you will ever know.

Have a great summer!

Max Findlay

It is my great honor to present the Canadian Neurosurgical Society's Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Charles Haskell Tator.

And what better way to do this than with the comments of some of Dr. Tator's friends and colleagues, such as our 2010 Congress Penfield Lecturer and Chair of the Division of Neurosurgery at the University of Toronto, Jim Rutka:

"Dr Charles Tator is the epitome of the term "neurosurgeon-scientist". He has selflessly devoted himself to the science and surgery of spinal cord injury over several decades. Long before it became popular or even possible for neurosurgeons to do research, Charles pursued answers to neurosurgical disease questions through his efforts in the laboratory. He won the respect of the neuroscience community through his outstanding peer reviewed publications, and his grant capture, right to this day."

And these are the words of Richard Reznick, Chair of the Department of Surgery at the University of Toronto when he wrote me, and now Dean of Medicine at Queen's University:

"Charles has been in the Canadian news "taking on" Don Cherry regarding the culture of minor hockey and its potential risk of head and spinal injuries. This is just like Charles. He is principled and data driven. He always stands up for what he thinks is right, and is evangelical with respect to injury prevention. At the University of Toronto we recently developed an award for the individual in our Department who best characterizes the spirit of true and total dedication towards supervision in our surgeon scientist program. We named it the Charles Tator Award."

And from Bob Bell, President and CEO of the University Health Network in Toronto:
Charles was my first surgical mentor when I arrived on the Neurosurgical Unit at Sunnybrook in "High Trauma Season", July 1st 1979. I had been in family practice for three years, had done a year of research and now found myself flung into my first rotation working for Dr. Tator and Company in neurosurgery. I knew absolutely nothing; I was useless. My first day Dr. Tator recognized just how little I knew and gave me an hour-long beginner's tutorial on how to interpret a Cervical Spine x-ray. I have never forgotten what he taught me that day and whenever I have been faced with a "challenged learner" in any aspect of my clinical or managerial career I remember how generous and patient Dr. Tator was and always has been in sharing his wisdom with students...I was lucky to have had him as a mentor.

I don't advise anyone of you to deliberately read Dr. Tator's CV. It makes even the most over-achieving neurosurgeon wonder just what the hell he or she has been doing with their time.

I wrote about Dr. Tator's origins in neurosurgery a long time ago and won't make him endure that story, except to mention that he was the last resident in the Toronto program accepted by Dr. Harry Botterell, and I think the first to obtain a PhD during his training. I will pass on something about Dr. Tator's surgical training, told to me by his life-long friend and colleague, famed cardiac surgeon Bernie Goldman, who told me:

"I have known and admired Charles since our early teens and have respected his growth as a neurosurgical leader – but did you know he was once a CHEER-leader! Imagine this staid icon of research and teaching in a white cable knit sweater and flowing school ribbons doing jumps and split, and twirling girls in skimpy, pleated skirts? And while I admired his tenacity and perseverance during his PhD years I was appalled by the story that he was dropping animals down the Banting elevator shaft to study spinal cord injury – he assured me that was pure nonsense. Nonetheless... years later when he was going to operate on my L4 -5 disc I got a little nervous as he personally escorted me to the elevators for my surgery!

While I have enjoyed being friends and colleagues throughout our lives, sharing joys and sorrows and referring patients and potential donors to each other, whenever the phone rings and it is my old buddy on the other end, my most cherished memories are still of long, long ago. Charles entered clinical surgical training after those years in research and was assigned to cardiovascular surgery at TGH, as my most junior resident while I was the most senior – so all you former trainees, esteemed neurosurgeons, researchers and eminent devotees of Charles Tator, know ye, know ye, that a heart surgeon taught him how to tie knots!

Charles has done so many things that it is hard to know where to start, but an early, and notable achievement was his establishment of the first acute spinal cord injury unit in Canada at Sunnybrook hospital in 1974. Combined to that clinical effort was the development of an excellent animal model for spinal cord injury, one of the first, which has been the focus of his laboratory research right up to this day. Let's hear from some of Dr. Tator's grad students, such as my friend and hero, Ab Guha, who wrote to me:

"Charles passion, inquisitiveness and patient guidance to ask relevant questions from our clinical world in an organized and logical manner in the laboratory and to express the findings in oral and written form was infectious and superb training, attributes I try to emulate for my own trainees. He truly demonstrated the feasibility and rewards in pursuing a neurosurgeon-scientist career that has shaped so many of our lives and our department here in Toronto."

And from another Tator student, and another friend of mine, John Hurlbert, advice passed on to him from Charles:

"John, everyone has their shortcomings, but our job is to see past them and bring out what they are best at."

Dr. Tator Founded the ThinkFirst Foundation of Canada in 1992, a charity devoted to the prevention of brain and spinal cord injuries among Canada's children and youth which now provides injury prevention messages to hundreds of thousands each year. For this and much more, Charles has received many awards, most notably our nations' highest award, the Order of Canada.

But our Canadian Neurosurgical Society can't let him off the hook without own highest award.

Let me finish with comments from just a few more of Dr. Tator's friends:

From Mark Bernstein, always the rebel—this is what passes as regular office garb for Mark these days:

"To me, Charles was perfection as a role model of an academic neurosurgeon, a tenacious pursuer of excellence in both practice and research, and a wonderfully genuine friend and mentor. Neurosurgery has been substantially enriched by his efforts. I have known a handful of truly great men in my time and he is one".

And very finally, from Charles' lifelong friend, and drinking buddy it would appear, Dr. Gerry Halbert:

"Outstanding, compassionate, dedicated, brilliant, committed, and a wonderful loyal friend"

What we have to commemorate this award is a small Inuit carving—a polar bear to be exact; everyone likes polar bears, but it's a nice one and not so big that it would be hard to pack home, along with a small plaque to tell everyone what this carving was given for. Please everyone stand and join me in celebrating Dr. Charles Tator, our richly deserving Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient.

RE: Eligibility of Canadian Trainees for Certification by the American Board of Neurological Surgery

Dear Dr. Selman,

In the late 1990's the American Board of Neurological Surgery (ABNS) ruled that graduates of Canadian training programs would no longer be eligible to sit American Board examinations and become "Board Certified". We in Canada are still not entirely sure why that decision was made; until then there had been a reciprocal situation whereby trainees who met Royal College training requirements in U.S. programs could sit our Royal College examinations, and trainees in Canadian programs who met American Board training requirements could sit theirs. Canadian Royal College training requirements in neurosurgery were then, and remain now, identical to ABNS requirements (including the increased requirement of 42 months of clinical neurosurgery training), and our programs are regularly monitored and credentialed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) which functions like the Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) in the United States. It is our belief that neurosurgical training is much the same in our country as it is in yours,

and indeed graduates of your programs are still able to sit our Royal College examinations.

Despite the ABNS ruling you might be aware that graduates of Canadian programs who have passed the Royal College examinations in neurosurgery continue to be recruited to and find work in the U.S., despite being “board ineligible”. It is perhaps helpful to keep actual numbers of neurosurgeons in perspective. On average, approximately 15 Canadians graduate from Canadian programs annually and only a fraction of these end up working in the U.S., often after completing fellowship training in a U.S. program.

The reason I am writing you is because Canadian graduates and residents in neurosurgery sincerely wish to be able to take the ABNS examination for certification. As President of the Canadian Neurosurgical Society and Chair of the Canadian Royal College Examination Committee (JMF) and Chair of the Royal College Specialty Committee for Neurosurgery (GR) we are petitioned by trainees from across Canada constantly to request that your board please revisit their position on Canadian training and eligibility. Their desire, we suppose no different from ours at their stage, is the opportunity to be fully and properly certified by the national bodies of our two countries if their career should point them in the direction of America.

We are sorry to burden you with this request because we know that others have already prevailed on your Board to reconsider their position on this matter, and you are likely weary of it. We have spoken at length to authorities at our RCPSC who collaborate with the ACGME, and they recommend we contact neurosurgeons on the American Board to determine if there is any opportunity for them to reconsider what is a very important issue for Canadian neurosurgery. Reversing your position on Canadian specialty training has precedent in the American Boards; recently Plastic Surgery reversed a similar stand.

At your request we can of course provide the ABNS our RCPSC's:

- Objectives of Core Training in Surgery
- Objectives of Training and Neurosurgery Specialty Training Requirements
- Specific Standards of Accreditation for Neurosurgery Residency Programs
- Accredited Neurosurgery Residency programs and program directors

If you wish we can summarize the key elements of these documents, and we are quite willing to come to meet the ABNS at their convenience to present our case with documentation, and answer any questions that you may have. We appreciate that you would require full verification that our training requirements and program accreditation process match your own.

We cannot properly express to you just how important this issue is to Canadian neurosurgeons. Virtually every single Canadian neurosurgical trainee we talk to wants to remain in Canada but they also want to be able to work in the U.S.A. certified by the ABNS if that is where their best opportunity exists. We would also like to emphasize that the only graduates we hope to make board eligible once again are Canadian citizens who have trained in Canada, and NOT foreign residents who complete specialty training in Canada. If our born and bred Canadian graduates wish and are able to work in your country, we can't help but think that the ABNS would like the opportunity to test them!

While we hate to resort to melodrama, we would like to remind you and your Board that Canada's founding neurosurgeon was Kenneth McKenzie, a Toronto surgeon who was trained by Harvey Cushing in neurosurgery and founded the University of Toronto's first neurosurgical training program, and that his contemporary and friend Wilder Penfield was an American who established the Montreal Neurological Institute

and Canada's second neurosurgical training program. We are confident that you yourself know personally more than a few Canadian neurosurgeons who have made important academic and professional contributions to American neurosurgery. We would like to see our neurosurgical communities remain close in every respect, and we hope you and the rest of the ABNS do too.

Thank you for considering this request from your northern neighbors.

Sincerely, and best personal regards,

President, Canadian Neurosurgical Society, Chair Royal College Examination
Committee for Neurosurgery

Chair, Royal College Specialty Committee for Neurosurgery