

LETTERS

Dare we hope

In an era when cries of “Lock her up” can rile a crowd to frenzy, it is the duty of a responsible editor to ensure that declamatory comment is backed up by academic rigour. It is clear that *CMAJ* recently failed this test.¹ It has compounded the error by encouraging the media to fan the flames such that the associated front page article of *The Star* claims that the journal is calling for an end to celebrating Sir William Osler.² Neither the authors nor the editor acknowledged the debt that *CMAJ* has to Osler, who not only encouraged its foundation but also frequently contributed articles when he was world-renowned and the journal was not.

The article is based on a non sequitur. Why did the editors not correct the intended, but false, impression that Drs. Augusta, Abbott, Oronhyatekha and Jones are forgotten because we are obsessed with Osler? Osler never hindered the careers of these physicians. Indeed, I believe that he would have supported the current interest in them, just as societies named for Osler have supported research into each of their lives. All of these doctors are included in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, easily available online. Drs. Augusta and Abbott feature in a book to be published by the American College of Surgeons on the historical role of Black surgeons in American medicine. Dr. Michelle

Hamilton presented her biography of Dr. Oronhyatekha, published by Dundurn Press a few years ago, to Western University’s Osler Society.³

The authors also used hearsay to condemn Osler. Death from pneumonia was more common among Black patients, just as with coronavirus disease 19 today. Why did the authors not quote from Osler when he addressed the topic of race directly?

“By his commission the physician is sent to the sick, and knowing in his calling neither Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, perhaps he alone rises superior to those differences which separate and make us dwell apart, too often oblivious to the common hopes and common frailties which should bind us together.”⁴

“... the priestly character of the physician has vanished with the ages; still there is left with us a strong feeling, of brotherhood, a sense of unity, which the limitations of language, race and country have not been able to efface.”⁴

“Distinctions of race, nationality, colour, and creed are unknown within the portals of the temple of Aesculapius. Dare we dream that this harmony and cohesion so rapidly developing in medicine, obliterating the strongest lines of division, knowing no tie of loyalty, but loyalty to truth — dare we hope, I say, that in the wider range of human affairs a similar solidarity may ultimately be reached?”⁵

If we have not achieved what Osler dared to hope for a century ago, we

should look to ourselves before we sling mud at another.

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