

# Dallas Medical Journal

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# President's Page

## A Journey Through Time, Courtesy of the DMJ

by Todd Pollock, MD



It is hard to believe that the Dallas County Medical Society humbly began 138 years ago in April. It began as the Medical Society of the City and County of Dallas, with 17 physicians meeting weekly to discuss cases and the business of the day. An unexcused absence would cost you \$1 (about \$25 in today's dollars, according to a quick Internet search). After a few fits and starts, the society took on its current name in 1884 with 30 members. Can you imagine the stories this organization could tell over those 138 years?

In 1914, the society began the Dallas County Medical Society Bulletin to tell those stories. In 1919, it was renamed the Dallas Medical Journal. The complete archives from 1919 to present, in bound volumes, can be found at the DCMS office. A little quick math (no Internet search needed) reveals that 2014 is the 100th anniversary of our little journal. So I decided to take a field trip down to the DCMS office to peruse those old volumes and to journey through that history.

Through the words of the journal, I planned to travel to a few interesting points in the history of Dallas, the United States,

and in medicine. I started my journey with the first bound volume, which was late 1919 and 1920. I opened the volume of fragile, yellowed pages and thought about what was happening at that time. Of course, that was in the middle of the 1918 flu pandemic (1918-1920) that infected 500 million people and killed as much as 5 percent of the world's population. I did not find direct reference to the worldwide pandemic, but its presence was evident. In those days, each journal contained a report from the Bureau of Vital Statistics, and I randomly selected one to review. In March 1920, there were 275 influenza cases reported. Of the 193 deaths in Dallas County (approximate population 200,000) that month, 17 deaths were from influenza (nearly 10 percent) second only to the 23 deaths from pneumonia (some of which likely were secondary infections of influenza). Interestingly, only nine cancer deaths and no cardiac-related deaths were noted. A June DMJ article titled "Important Roentgen Ray Findings in the Chest" stated that this fairly new technology was an "especially important subject with us because of the many chest complications following the influenza." It reported about 500 "Roentgen Ray" exams of the chest, of which 90 percent were related to patients with influenza.

Although the tone of the journal in the 1920s was a little more formal and stiff, there was the occasional attempt at humor. For example, the January 1920 edition included a report from New York titled "Girls Ban Kisses as Epidemic Grows," telling of a group of young women who formed a society sworn to refrain from kissing until the flu epidemic passed. The report ended with the statement that "we would rather not insinuate that it was necessary for our Dallas girls to refrain." Each edition also

included joke. I looked through several to find one to include, but suffice it to say that none has stood the test of time.

I jumped ahead to the January 1942 journal, the first volume published following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There were no jokes in this edition. The journal begins with a message from the new society president, John L. Goforth, MD, who acknowledges the job ahead for DCMS members will be a tough one as "much will be expected and demanded of the medical profession in the immediate future." He asked for "full, enthusiastic and constant cooperation of each member of the society." This was followed by a passionate and moving note from editor W.W. Fowler, who set the journal's tone with statements such as:

Forces of evil are endeavoring to destroy every vestige of our freedom and liberty, but we sincerely believe that right will prevail. The great self-sacrificing and noble profession of medicine in America has ever stood for freedom and liberty in every avenue of life, and by the help of God we hope to see these principles for which our forefathers fought, triumph over our enemies.

His words fill the reader with pride of country and profession, and are worth a complete read. Each journal during the war years listed DCMS members who were serving in the military, plus their branch, rank and where they were stationed.

I decided to move on to better times. On Sept. 25, 1954, the doors of the current Parkland Memorial Hospital opened for business as "Operation Transfer" was initiated. That Saturday morning a fleet of 30 ambulances caravanned down Harry Hines Boulevard, transferring patients from

the old facility at Oak Lawn and Maple to the new hospital. Two months later, Southwestern Medical School would open the basic science building, the first “unit” of many to come. DCMS President Frank A. Selecman, MD, describes this as “a part of the Great March of Medicine, and will bring added honors to Dallas as a growing Medical Center.” The facility was state of the art. “To attempt to describe the new building in the space allotted would be impossible, but in summary fashion can best be described as a ‘hospital of tomorrow.’”

A short time from now, an even newer Parkland will open with facilities that will be equally as hard to describe. Parkland will be a shining symbol of the outstanding medical community Dallas has become and will continue that “Great March of Medicine.”

The DCMS mission statement in part is to “promote a healthy community” and our Society has a long history of involvement in public health initiatives. This aspect of the Society clearly was demonstrated in the fight against poliomyelitis. In the mid-1950s,

Dallas was selected as a site for mass inoculation of second-grade students with the new Salk vaccine. Because of the pressure to get the vaccine out to the public, the scientific evidence on the safety and efficacy of this new vaccine was not available publicly. The DCMS Public Health Committee stepped in, spending hours to thoroughly review the evidence and experimental data before approving this mass inoculation program.

The medical community and the Society were heavily criticized for this perceived delay, but the Society did not waiver from its principles of protecting the public. This was clearly articulated by DCMS President, R.E. Lee, MD, in his May 1955 President’s

Page. In the end, DCMS approved the inoculation program on the basis of a complete scientific analysis and went on to lead the inoculation program. In 1962 the *Dallas Times Herald* would laud the leadership of the Dallas County Medical Society for organizing the two “Sabin Sundays” where thousands of professional and lay volunteers vaccinated hundreds of thousands of people.

Of course, no trip down Dallas’ Memory Lane would be complete without a look at the feelings that were generated by the tragic events occurring on Nov. 22, 1963. President Max Cole, MD, wrote of the “shock and grief” Dallas shared with the nation in the assassination of President Kennedy. He also pointed out the shock

regarding the profession, concerns that the government will destroy medicine with this piece of legislation or that, the out-of-control costs of medical care, malpractice abuse, insurance company interference — all seem to repeat themselves time and time again. Yet the medical profession persists, just as noble and just as gratifying with continued advancement in curing disease, improving health and extending happy and productive life.

When I agreed to take on the role of DCMS president, one of my biggest concerns was the duty of writing the monthly president’s page. My adventure of looking back at history through the eyes of the journal didn’t alleviate those fears. I now appreciate more than ever how the

journal provides a contemporaneous history of Dallas medicine and the presidents shoulder much of this responsibility through the views they express in their monthly essays.

To honor and celebrate the Centennial Anniversary of the journal, an ad hoc DMJ Centennial Committee made up of three brave,

past presidents — Drs. Gordon Green, Richard Joseph and Fred Ciarochi — have been tasked with reviewing all 100 years of the Dallas Medical Journal, a decade at a time. They will select the most meaningful, impactful and interesting essays, commentaries and President’s Pages in the journal’s history. The selected excerpts will be reprinted each month, starting in this issue. At the end of the year, the best of the 100 years will be selected and reprinted. I truly look forward to seeing what they come up with. Now that I understand the important role I have in documenting history, I’d better start thinking about what to write next month. **DMJ**

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regarding circulating implications of Dallas being, in some way, guilty. Over the loss of a president and the irrational implications, he wrote, “Our city has been hurt. The hurt is there — and healing is necessary.”

I had a great time reading through those old journals. So many interesting articles, pictures, ads, and store names (remember Skillern’s Drugstore?) that were nearly lost memories. In this journey back through time, I realized that nothing is ever really new. Issues our predecessors struggled with in the past are reprised today and likely will be around in the future. Concerns the medical community wrote about 50 or even 100 years ago often could be reprinted today verbatim. Ethical and moral concerns