

Preface



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Guest Editors

"If I have seen farther than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants."

*Sir Isaac Newton
Letter to Robert Hooke (15 February 1676)*

Critical care medicine is a young subspecialty. Many of the early titans of the discipline have lived and worked well within the memory of senior members of the profession. Contrary to popular professional perception, however, the origins of critical care do not begin with the polio epidemics that necessitated the development of positive pressure ventilation in the 1950s or with the introduction of the balloon-tipped, flow-guided, thermodilution cardiac output-capable pulmonary artery catheter in the 1970s. Rather, the genesis of critical care medicine is built on a base of other disciplines stretching back through generations of physicians, many of whose names are now only familiar to scholars of the history of medicine. Well know healers, physicians, and scientists, such as Galen, Harvey, Crile, and Courmand, and lesser known lights, such as Guthrie, Goltz, Henderson, Bradley, van Meenerem, Dotter, Carrel, Waldenburg, and Murray each in their own way set the foundations for the birth and development of critical care medicine.

This discipline, at the cutting edge of technology in medicine, has advanced tremendously in recent decades. Given the speed with which the field is developing it is very easy to focus only on the road ahead, ignoring the path already travelled. It is difficult to know where critical care medicine is going as a subspecialty, however, without understanding how it came to be at its present point.

Central to understanding critical care medicine's professional past is an examination of the challenges and contributions of its predecessors as they forged the path now followed. We are aware of no such similar effort as it relates to critical care medicine and hope that illumination of the footsteps of our professional forebears provides direction for future progress in the field.

“Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum.”

“He who knows only his own generation remains always a child.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero

Roman philosopher, statesman, and orator (106 BC–43 BC)

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