

Alternative Methods to Teach History of Anesthesia



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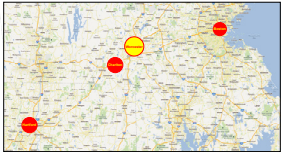
Background:

History of Anesthesia [HOA] may be taught through lectures, small group discussions, or by one-on-one teaching. HOA competes for scarce time in a busy didactic schedule and for coverage in mainstream medical journals devoted to anesthesiology. These efforts are hampered by the fact that HOA does not have any direct impact on the delivery of modern anesthesia, and the fact that these topics do not appear in written or oral board examinations.

We describe three additional modalities to teach HOA to anesthesia residents that have been successfully employed by the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Massachusetts.

I. Tours: Many events related to HOA occurred in New England, and sites related to individuals and events are amenable to individual visits and tours, especially since Worcester, Massachusetts is located midway between Boston, MA and Hartford, CT. At University of Massachusetts, we have established an informal, 3-year curriculum to teach HOA to our residents using three modalities – tours; books and novels; and movies/videos related to HOA. We have devised three separate tours conducted over three years. Such tours provide excellent coverage of sites in Massachusetts as well as Connecticut.¹

Map of Boston, Worcester, and Hartford



Ether Dome at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston



Ether Monument in Boston Public Gardens



Horace Wells' Grave (l), Cedar Hill Cemetery, and Statue (r), Bushnell Park, Hartford, CT

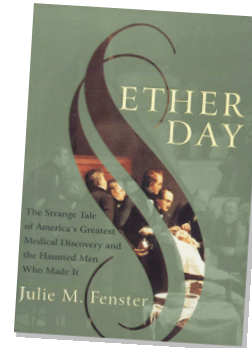


WTG Morton's Birthplace, Charlton, MA



WTG Morton's Grave, Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA

2. Historical narratives and novels: Topics related to HOA receive scant coverage in modern textbooks of anesthesia, and are often relegated to an introductory chapter. In the past, each major category of topics would have a brief discussion of its history, but regrettably, this practice too has been abandoned in the interest of space. We encourage our CA-I residents to go through the extremely readable and informative 'Ether Day: The strange tale of America's greatest medical discovery and the haunted men who made it,' by Julie M. Fenster.² In addition, there are many historical narratives and novels that cover other important aspects of HOA in the popular literature.



3. Movies and video clips: Without disrupting the prime-time schedule of grand rounds and other departmental lectures, we screen the 1944 Hollywood movie 'The Great Moment,'³ starring James McCrea as William T. G. Morton, sometime in August for CA-I residents. In addition, we also screen 'The Yankee Dodge,' narrated by Leroy D. Vandam, M.D. from Harvard Medical School, and produced by the Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.⁴



The Great Moment, a 1944 Hollywood movie

Conclusions:

It is difficult to impart information using lectures due to time constraints and a very busy didactic schedule in residency programs. HOA related material does not get adequate coverage in standard textbooks of anesthesiology. We describe successful use of three modalities of imparting interesting information in an informal setting. Such efforts provide a unique experience during residency training. From preliminary reports we are confident that details from such tours, novels and movies remain imprinted in their memory for many years, perhaps permanently. These individuals are likely to remain advocates of history, and may choose to devote a part of their academic career towards exploration of HOA.

References:

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2. Fenster JM: Ether Day. New York, HarperCollins, 2001.
3. Preston Sturges (Director). The Great Moment (in Black and White). McCrea J, Field B, and Carey H. 1944. Paramount Pictures.
4. Leroy D.Vandam (Narrator). The Yankee Dodge. 1990. Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology