

CORRESPONDENCE

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Early Use of the Cushing-Codman Anesthesia Record

To the Editor:—Prior to 1932, when Tovell *et al.* described a method of anesthesia recordkeeping for the purpose of statistical analysis,¹ very little material appears in the medical literature concerning anesthesia records. Cushing and Codman, while students at Massachusetts General Hospital, devised the first such record, the famous "ether chart," in 1894,² but examples were not published until 8 years later.³ Goldan included the first published chart, one pertaining to spinal anesthesia, in an article in 1900.⁴ Three years later, Cushing published a detailed account of his blood pressure chart.⁵ Finally, in 1924, Lundy published a brief article that emphasized the importance of anesthesia records and described those he kept.⁶

Despite this paucity of published information during the first 4 decades of anesthesia recordkeeping, the practice may have been fairly widespread. A tantalizing clue to that effect appeared in 1901. In April of that year, B. B. Rogan, a physician from Selma, Alabama, delivered a paper entitled "Remarks on the Administration of Anaesthetics, with Special Reference to the Technique of Chloroform Administration" to the annual meeting of the state medical society. His talk concluded with some interesting comments about anesthesia records.

"It is, of course, unnecessary to emphasize the fact that the anaesthetist should give his entire attention to the patient from the beginning to the end of the operation. I have recently adopted the ether chart, devised by Dr. Cushing of Johns Hopkins Hospital. This is nothing more than a chart very similar to the ordinary temperature chart for recording the pulse and respiration at intervals of five minutes during the operation. It undoubtedly stimulates the anaesthetist to give closer attention to his patient, and he can inform the operator, at any time, as to the condition of the patient.

"I believe that nothing so trains a person to become skilled in the administration of anaesthetics as the routine employment of the charts."⁷

How a physician in Alabama learned of Cushing's anesthesia records remains something of a mystery. Although he graduated from the University of Tennessee Medical School in 1896, Barney Burns Rogan returned to his native Alabama and practiced medicine in Selma until his death in 1933 at the age of fifty-eight. At the time of Rogan's talk, Cushing had left Johns Hopkins Hospital, where he was a resident under William S. Halsted from 1896 to 1900. In July of the latter year, Cushing began a 14-month trip to Europe, in which he visited numerous neurologists and neurosurgeons.⁸

One or both of two events that occurred in 1898 may have provided an opportunity for the physicians to meet.

On August 29, 1898, Cushing left Baltimore for Huntsville, Alabama, as part of a group from Johns Hopkins that met about 40 Spanish-American war veterans of the Fifth Maryland Regiment and returned with them to their home state.⁹ This trip provided Cushing his first experience with typhoid perforation of the gut; the resulting operations he performed led to a pair of well-received papers.¹⁰ Presumably, the troops arrived in Huntsville from the port city of Mobile; perhaps Rogan accompanied the men. In late October, 1898, Cushing again traveled to the south to deliver one of the papers dealing with typhoid perforation to a meeting of the Southern Tri-State Medical Society held in Chattanooga.¹¹ Perhaps Rogan attended the meeting.

Whatever the mechanism, Rogan did learn of Cushing's use of the ether chart, recognized its importance, and adopted it for his own practice. Thus, the young physician continued a tradition in his state of rapid adoption of anesthetic developments.¹² His use of the record also indicates that anesthesia recordkeeping may have spread quickly after Cushing and Codman's initial efforts.

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