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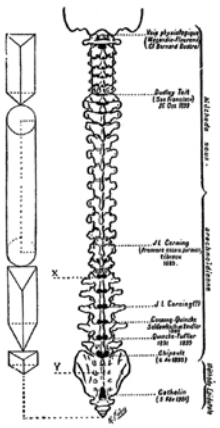
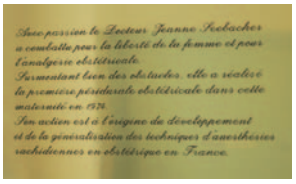
ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE PIERRE VIARS MUSEUM

Epidural Anesthesia at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital: From Fernand Cathelin (1901) to Jeanne Seebacher (1974)





The discovery of the epidural technique for locoregional anesthesia has been attributed to two independent French physicians, Jean Athanase Sicard (1872–1929) and Fernand Cathelin (1873–1945). However, for many French historians, it seems that the credit of the discovery should be attributed to Cathelin and that Sicard was something of an opportunist, being aware of the research conducted by Cathelin at the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital. An image from the book of Cathelin published in 1903 is shown (*left*) and represents the main historical steps in the development of epidural injections from 1885 to 1901. In 1974, in the Pitié-Salpêtrière, the anesthesiologist Jeanne Seebacher (*top right*) introduced epidural anesthesia in obstetrics for the first time in France. In the obstetric department, a memorial tablet celebrates that event (*bottom right*): "With passion, Jeanne Seebacher struggled for the freedom of women and for obstetric analgesia. Overcoming many obstacles, she performed the first obstetric epidural anesthesia in 1974 in France in this hospital. Her action was the first step toward a widespread use of epidural and intrathecal anesthesia for obstetrical analgesia in France."

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