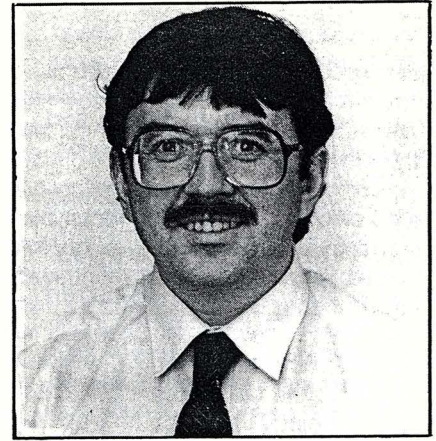


## Section on the History of Medicine

# The Effect of the Flexner Report on Medical Education in Nova Scotia, Part 2

Dr. David B. Hogan FRCPC, FACP\* and Dr. T.J. Murray FRCPC, FACP



\*Dr. Hogan received his MD degree from Dalhousie University in 1977. He is now an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine at Dalhousie University.

The Editor of the Section on the History of Medicine is Dr. William B. Spaulding, Research Associate in Medical History at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont.

Address for reprints: Dr. D.B. Hogan FRCPC, Dept. of Medicine, Camp Hill Hospital, Halifax, N.S. B3H 3G2.

### Consequences

In Nova Scotia, Flexner's report did not incite any comment outside the university and medical communities. There was no coverage in the local press, and no debate was held in the provincial legislature. It was discussed at the 1910 annual meeting of the Nova Scotia Medical Society (30). Editorials in the Canadian Medical Association Journal defended the school, but advocated changes, in particular, a return to the bosom of Dalhousie University (8,9,10). The *Lancet* suggested that the Halifax Medical College become a "preparatory school for McGill" (31).

The Medical Society of Nova Scotia, at its July 1910 meeting, passed a resolution in which it "finds that the report is prejudiced, inaccurate and misleading. The Society considers that the best answer to the report is furnished by the good standing and success of the practitioners who receive their education in Halifax. The Society believes that the Halifax Medical College has proved its efficiency and that it serves a useful purpose in the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland, and it strongly recommends that every effort should be made to ensure the continuance of a medical

school in Halifax" (16).

The strongest argument to continue with medical education in Halifax was geographical. The school served a large area with a population of 1.25 million (30). It was situated approximately 800 miles from the nearest English Canadian "first-class" centre of medical teaching, McGill and Montreal (8). Even in its present state, it met local needs to a great extent.

Even before the official release of the Flexner report, moves were afoot in the Halifax Medical College to change its relationship to Dalhousie. At the semi-annual meeting of the Halifax Medical College Corporation on May 11, 1910, the following motion was accepted by the members:

"Whereas a medical school has been in operation in Halifax for over 40 years being the only institution of its kind in the Maritime Provinces and, whereas the existence of such a school has not only met the supplying of medical education to a considerable portion of the young men especially of Nova Scotia and the neighbouring two provinces who after graduation either at home or abroad have as a general thing stood well when brought into contact and comparison with students and graduates of other institutions, in many cases excelling their

competitors, but further inasmuch as the presence of this school has been a great assistance to the Provincial Board in bringing about a general elevation of the status of the medical profession throughout the Province and, whereas in some respects at least the facilities for teaching and the opportunities for study available in Halifax excell similar conditions in other institutions with much more pretentious and elaborate plant and equipment, it seems evident that the continuation of a medical school in this city of Halifax is fully justified and its abandonment would be a calamity; at the same time the great advances in all departments of the medical sciences with the associated demands for increased laboratory facilities and for special instructors in these departments make it absolutely essential, in order to even hold the position which has been attained, that a forward movement be made and believing that the first step in this direction must be a return to the University: therefore, resolved



that the Governors of Dalhousie University be requested to consider at the earliest possible date the question of taking over the Halifax Medical College and establish in its place a full teaching faculty in the University" (32).

A committee was struck to negotiate with Dalhousie University. A report produced by the committee to be forwarded to Dalhousie was discussed item by item at the corporation's meeting of September 9, 1910. Several interesting items were passed. It was resolved that the professors of pathology and physiology would be barred from clinical practice. The chiefs of the clinical departments were to be granted the rank of professor, and not that of lecturer as recommended in the report. Removed from the report were some critical statements dealing with the "Professorial standing of the present clinical teachers" (32).

The corporation held a special meeting on March 21, 1911 to discuss "communication from the Governors of Dalhousie University" (32). This communication stated: "That the report of the committee with reference to the medical college be adopted and that the Board offer to pay the medical college a sum not exceeding \$6,000 for the good title to the real estate and equipment of the medical college, it being left to the Finance Committee and the President to carry out the arrangement with the medical college" (32). This provoked much debate. The President of Acadia University made a presentation dealing with medical education "and particularly in regard to the affiliated course of the first year medicine and arts at Acadia University" (32). One wonders if there was a counter-proposal from Acadia University to become formally affiliated with the medical school. When brought to motion, seven individuals voted in favor of the resolution, two against, and seven "here but not voting." (The corporation then had between 30 and 40 members.) The corporation cleared up its business in the spring of 1911, and ceased to exist.

The President's report of Dalhousie University for 1911-12 suggested that the welcome for the medical faculty was tepid: "In the early part of 1911, the Halifax Medical College, finding it difficult to carry on the work of medical teaching, approached the university with the request that it should undertake

this task, and offered to sell its property to the university and assist the university in every way in obtaining an act of the legislature vesting the university all the rights and property and teaching appliances hitherto held by the Halifax Medical College. After full consideration of the question the Board of Governors consented, and the transfer was made, though the Board fully realized that they were making a heavy financial sacrifice in so doing" (33). No dean for the faculty of medicine was appointed till after the First World War, but the prime mover at the time of transfer was Dr. A.W.H. Lindsay whose formal title was secretary of the faculty. He was also professor of anatomy, registrar of the provincial medical board, and a general practitioner. Said to have had the makings of a good surgeon, he devoted himself instead to the teaching of anatomy of which he was "a master" (19). He died in 1915. The other major player in the faculty of medicine was Dr. D.A. Campbell who was a professor of clinical medicine. A graduate of the Halifax Medical College, he had been a member of the medical college and the board of governors of Dalhousie for approximately 30 years. During those years, he was the leading consultant in Nova Scotia. He spent a few weeks every year or so at Johns Hopkins where he became acquainted with their educational ideals (19). He started an endowment fund for a chair in anatomy at Dalhousie in 1913.

Of the 41 listed faculty members of the Halifax Medical College for 1910-11, 22 had positions in the new faculty of medicine at Dalhousie. Many who remained had "demotions" in their academic rank (34). The new professor of surgery was Dr. N.E. MacKay. A sign of the bad blood present was the fact that ownership of the medical library of the Halifax Medical College was contested by Dalhousie University and the Medical Society of Nova Scotia all the way to the provincial supreme court (33).

After the re-organization of the school of medicine, there was no immediate change in its finances. In 1909-10, the expenditures of the school were \$6,200, which translated into \$98 per student. In 1911-12 (the first year under the aegis of Dalhousie) the expenditures of the faculty of medicine were \$7,258, which translated into \$92 per student. The expenditure per student per year remained in this range until the 1920s.

The financial situation of the medical school did not change until 1920, when a grant of \$500,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation and a matching grant of \$500,000 from the Carnegie Foundation were received by Dalhousie for the improvement of the medical faculty (33).

Admission policy did not change much after the transfer. It is important to note the smallness of the university sector in Canada at this time. In 1900, Canada had a population of 5.3 million served by 20 universities that had only 9,700 university students (1.8 per 1,000 population) (35). Thus, there was a small base of "qualified" (college-educated) applicants for positions in medical schools. As late as 1920, the number of university students (including medical students) in Nova Scotia was 1,247 (36). Previous college education was not a requirement for admission to Dalhousie Medical School at this time. Admission was limited to those who passed a matriculation examination given by the university at the start of the academic year or to those with certificates viewed as equivalent. Nova Scotia High School Certificates for successful completion of Grade 11 were acceptable until 1924-25, when it was changed to a requirement for a Grade 12 certificate (34).

While no significant changes occurred with regards to clinical resources, improvements in the basic science departments did occur. A full-time professor in physiology was appointed, and laboratories in physiology were started (38). Over the three years after the transfer of the medical school back to Dalhousie, new laboratories were established in bacteriology, pathology and physiology.

How did other people see the school after these changes? By 1919-20, the medical school was complimented by President G.E. Vincent and Dr. R.M. Pearce of the Rockefeller Foundation for its "tone and spirit" (33). The Carnegie report of 1922 dealing with education in the Maritime provinces stated about the medical school: "... instructors in the professional schools are at present on a full-time basis, and laboratory and clinical facilities have achieved an organization that is exceptional. The manner in which Dalhousie has developed its medical school is praiseworthy. It has co-operated with the city and province in a most practical and efficient manner,



and has secured from a group of hospitals now centred about the medical school the concessions necessary to assure the privileges that a teaching faculty ought to have" (36).

The ratings of the school by the American Medical Association Council of Medical Education reflect this changing status. Starting with a 1909-10 survey, medical schools in the United States and Canada were assigned grades of A (and sometimes A+), B and C. An A rating indicated that the school was acceptable. B schools needed improvements, while C schools needed a general re-organization. (7) These ratings were based on a scale itemizing characteristics thought to be important in medical education. The data were collected during site visits by representatives of the American Medical Association. In 1910, the Halifax Medical College was given a rating of B, not the dreaded C one might anticipate from what Flexner wrote about the school (37). This rating stayed the same after visits in 1913 and in November, 1924. In November, 1924, it was stated that the changes undertaken at Dalhousie "scarcely warrant the council in granting a Class A rating" (37). At the request of the school, another visit was made in the late spring or early summer of 1925. In the business meeting of the American Medical Association Council of Medical Education of October 18, 1925, Dalhousie was raised to a Class A "owing to the marvelous developments made during the last five years" (37). One must wonder about what happened over a period of less than a year which led to this change in opinion. The class A rating was at the instigation of the same Dr. N.P. Colwell who had accompanied Abraham Flexner in the infamous visit of 1909.

### Conclusion

One studies history not to predict the future but to learn from the past. What can we learn from the impact of the Flexner report on the Halifax Medical College? Flexner was not the first person to suggest that the medical school should move back to Dalhousie University. The turmoil induced by his visit and report (or at least the threat of his report before its publication) probably gave local individuals the opportunity they had been seeking to return medical education to

Dalhousie University. One could argue that established medical schools only change as a result of outside pressure.

Aside from lessons, this story tells us about the personalities and institutions involved. From our standpoint, Flexner's "inspections" were hurried and superficial. Flexner was not an objective reviewer. He was an advocate of a certain way of medical education. If a school did not fit his model, he aimed to eliminate it or change it so that from his viewpoint it became an acceptable and progressive institution. Flexner's description of the Halifax Medical College was slanted to present it in the worse possible light. We believe Flexner viewed it as a proprietary school that should be attacked and altered.

While Flexner's means were suspect, we think his end was worthwhile. His report spurred the return of the medical school to Dalhousie University. Quickly, this led to the strengthening of the basic science component and laid the ground-work for improving the school in the future. For example, it is unlikely that the medical school would have attracted a million dollars in grants in the next decade if it had remained as an independent structure called the Halifax Medical College.

What the future will hold for Dalhousie University and its faculty of medicine is unknown. This is a time of change in medical education and in the profession of medicine itself. It is hard to argue with what Theodor Billroth said in his lecture at the Second Surgical Department, Vienna (October 11, 1867): "The future of a school is based on the work of the pupils, as is the future of a country on the work of its citizens."

### Summary

The Flexner report led to several developments in Nova Scotian medical education. The prime result of the report was the re-integration of the faculty of medicine in Dalhousie University. This led quickly to improvements in the basic science departments. Eventually, the school improved to the point where it could compete successfully for grants awarded by the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations. While one may not approve of Flexner's methods, the results of his report were beneficial to medical education in Nova Scotia.

### Sommaire

Le rapport Flexner mena à plusieurs développements de la formation médicale en Nouvelle-Écosse. C'est la réintégration de la faculté de médecine à l'Université Dalhousie qui fut le résultat le plus important, ce qui conduisit à une amélioration rapide de la qualité des départements de sciences fondamentales. Éventuellement, les progrès furent tels que la faculté pouvait rivaliser avec les autres pour l'obtention d'octrois des fondations Rockefeller et Carnegie. Bien qu'il ne soit pas facile pour plusieurs d'approuver les méthodes de Flexner, son rapport a quand même profité à la formation médicale en Nouvelle-Écosse.

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