

MCPHEDRAN LECTURE

Dr. Norman Tait McPhedran

Professor and Head, Department of Surgery (1969 – 1991)



Dr. Norman Tait McPhedran was born in Saskatoon in 1924, but spent his early school years in Calgary. He finished high school in Campbell River and then went directly into the Army in 1942. He served in the European theatre until 1946. The last year of this service was as a pre-medical student in London at the Khaki University. He completed Medical School in 1956 at the University of Toronto and then returned to Alberta for two years of family practice before undertaking a surgical residency at the University of Toronto from 1953 to 1958. Following this he was awarded a McLaughlin Traveling Fellowship which he spent in the United States and was then recruited back to the University of Toronto as the Chisholm Memorial Fellow in Surgery. In 1961 he was appointed to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto and

the medical staff at the Toronto General Hospital.

In 1969 he became the first professor of surgery and chairman of the Department of Surgery at the University of Calgary's new medical school. He had the difficult job of blending a few academic surgeons into a community of doctors many of whom had settled in Calgary partly due to the lack of a medical school. It is true that a number of surgeons eagerly participated and welcomed the opportunity to become clinical (so-called part-time) faculty, however, there were many who were skeptical, and blending the "town" and "gown" was an enormous challenge. Dr. McPhedran met this challenge and did a masterful job. He did so by being inclusive and non-judgmental, applying his unique and folksy manner.

Among his professional accomplishments, Dr. McPhedran had a great reputation as an effective clinical teacher. He was a leader in many surgical organizations, including serving as a Regent of the American College of Surgeons from 1984 to 1993. An ongoing interest in medical history led to his authorship of the book "Canadian Medical Schools: Two Centuries of Medical History, 1822 – 1992." He had a reputation for being a good communicator and fair negotiator, and he was skilled at stimulating and encouraging people to achieve their maximum potential within the Department of Surgery.

Dr. McPhedran was a member of the founding Faculty of the Medical School and inaugural Chair of the Department of Surgery and Chief of Surgery at the Foothills Hospital. It was during his time as Head of the Surgery Department that the Calgary History of Medicine Program was inaugurated by a member of his department, Dr. Peter J. Cruse (1925-2004). Tait McPhedran was a strong supporter of the University of Calgary's History of Medicine program which began in the Department of Surgery. He was a preceptor for students at the History of Medicine Days conferences for many years, and always asked insightful questions of the students after their conference presentations. He took part in the early regular meetings of physicians interested in history of medicine topics, out of which the Calgary History of Medicine Society (CHOMS) evolved. He was a former President of the Canadian Association of General Surgery (1981) and through his involvement with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) and with Peter Cruse's support, furthered research and writing significantly within the history of surgery and medicine in Canada. He was also published widely on history of medicine topics, with the most significant being on the aspect of the history of medical education in North America.