

The History of the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society (1954-1989)

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To a historian, taking a backward glance after only 35 years might be classed as a review of current events, rather than as history, but the study of infertility has a very short history indeed. The entire topic of infertility occupied only one page in the 1792 text book "A Treatise on the Management of Female Complaints" by Alexander Hamilton, who was the professor of midwifery at the University of Edinburgh. The post coital test was not introduced until the 1860s, after Marion Sims moved to New York City from his practice in rural Alabama. Even the analysis of semen, as we know it today, was not reported in detail until 1920.

Thus, it is not surprising that the history of fertility societies such as this one is also fairly recent: the Society for the Study of Fertility, the American Fertility Society, and the International Federation of Fertility Societies have all evolved since the Second World War. The Society for the Study of Reproduction was not started until 1966, and so the founding of the Canadian Fertility Society in 1954 was a remarkably early and forward-looking event.

From its beginning in 1954, the Canadian Fertility Society attracted scientific and clinical guest speakers from around the world. This international profile began with such names as John MacLeod, Edward Hughes, Sam Behrman and C. Lee Buxton and has continued with in the last few years with Catherine Rivier, Gordon Niswender, Dick Sherens, and Fred Naftolin. In 1989, visiting scientists in a variety of fields from America and abroad included Roger Gorski, Richard Marrs, David Meldrum, William Keye, Gary Hodgen, and Pierre Jouannet.

This summary of the Society's first 35 years is based on the programmes of the Society's annual meetings from 1954 to 1988. Also the living past presidents were asked for comments on the highlights of their presidency and its annual meeting. It has often been said that history is biography, and this backward glance will therefore focus on people.

Obviously, this reminiscence cannot provide a complete catalogue of every meeting; it will provide some detail of the inaugural meeting, and then single out highlights from other early meetings. Of course, one notable development was the Society's initial period of buoyancy and success which began with the La Sapiniere years. Unfortunately, a detailed account of the La Sapiniere years or the outstanding programmes in the years just before 1989 is not possible.

The first annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Fertility was held at the Windsor Hotel in Montreal, from September 30 to October 2, 1954. The following information was printed in the programme to describe the origins of the Society:

"Nine physicians and two doctors of veterinary medicine met in Toronto on May 5, 1953, to form a committee for the study of fertility. The Canadian Society for the Study of Fertility was founded officially by the Board of Directors in Toronto,

July 1, 1953.

The aims of the Society are to promote investigative and educational work in the field of reproduction; to evaluate diagnostic methods and therapy; and to promote research in reproduction.”

Those aims could very well define the objectives of the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society for the 1990s. The first meeting of the Society included speakers from Canada, the United States and Mexico. The president of the Society that year was Dr. Lou Harris, chief of obstetrics and gynaecology, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto. The speakers included John MacLeod, PhD, Assistant Professor of Anatomy, College of Medicine, Cornell University; New York City, and Cliff Barker, chief of the Division of Animal Reproduction, Ontario Veterinary College, Guelph, Ontario, who discussed spermatozoa and sperm freezing. Other famous names included in this programme were M. Edward Davis, from the University of Chicago; James Norris, who went on to a senior post at the University of Toronto; M.M. Braunstein, who was in charge of the sterility clinic at the Jewish General Hospital in Montreal; Chauncey Pattee who was in the Department of Medicine at McGill University, and who was, subsequently, president of the Society in 1955. Another speaker was Carl Hartman, for whom the Society for the Study of Reproduction has since named a senior research award, and Dr. Newell Philpot, Professor and Chairman of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at McGill University.

One of the highlights of this meeting was a round table on the endocrine aspects of infertility. The members of that round table included J.S.L. Brown, PhD, FRCPC, Professor of Medicine at McGill University; Abraham Rakoff, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecologic Endocrinology at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia; and Edwin Robertson, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Queen’s University, Kingston. Also present at that round table, was Earl Plunkett. At that time, Earl was a recently qualified MD and PhD, serving as an instructor in medical research at the University of Western Ontario. I think it is entirely possible that the only person present at the meeting in 1989 who was also at the first meeting was Earl Plunkett.

The Society has always enjoyed the generous sponsorship of industry. The successors of three 1954 sponsors were also sponsors of the 1989 meeting. They included Ayerst, McKenna and Harrison of Montreal; Sandoz of Montreal; and John Wyeth and Brother, Walkerville, Ontario.

In 1956 and 1957, Evan Shute of London, Ontario, and Professor Robertson of Kingston, respectively, were the presidents. Both of these meetings were at the Royal York and speakers included Ira Rubin from New York City, Edward Hughes from Syracuse, Sam Behrman from Ann Arbor, and C. Lee Buxton from New Haven. In 1957 the Ortho prize was introduced for “the most significant Canadian contribution based on original research in the field of reproduction.”

In 1958, Earl Plunkett became president, having been the secretary-treasurer since the second year of the Society’s existence. The meeting was held at the YMCA building in London, Ontario, with Bob Kinch in the chair. Jack Walters talked about vaginal cytology and endocrine disease, and Dr. Carlo Bos, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University, talked on

“Psychogenic Factors in Infertility”. The meeting adjourned on Saturday afternoon to watch the UWO Mustangs trounce the University of Toronto Varsity Blues.

By the time of the 1960 meeting of the Canadian Fertility Society there were 91 members and George Arronet was Secretary. Professor Green-Armytage from London lectured on the use of antibiotics and prednisolone with fimbrioplasty, and on the use of suspension and ovarian attachment to the fundus as a treatment for tubal infertility. These patients received carbon dioxide insufflations of the tubes every week for six weeks after surgery. Leon Israel from Philadelphia gave a lecture on the hypophalamus, and Calvin Ezrin described the gonadotrophin-synthesizing cells in the pituitary. Ezrin was the University of Toronto endocrinologist who popularized the concept of seven cells for seven hormones.

Dr. E.O Strassmann of Houston, Texas, had just published the largest series of operations to repair the double uterus. This quote from the 1960 meeting abstracts highlights the state-of-the-art operation at the time his father pioneered the procedure.

“My father, more than 50 years ago in 1907, did the first metroplasty on a woman who had lost seven of her eight pregnancies. The operation was done through the vagina, and the woman, thereafter, had six pregnancies, all of which were carried to term and delivered through the vagina.”

Another interesting contribution at that meeting was from Dr. C.H. Birnberg of Brooklyn, New York. Dr. Birnberg addressed the explosive growth in births after World War II, making use of morphological and functional evidence which suggested an increased frequency of ovulation. The evidence consisted of having seen on occasion more than one corpus luteum at the time of laparotomy, and the observation of increased urinary concentrations of FSH in women after orgasm. This was interpreted to mean that the baby boom was due to frequent ovulations induced by a coital reflex. Dr. Birnberg did not explain how these fundamental changes in human reproduction might have been induced for the first time in the history of the race during the years following the Second World War.

In 1962 when Dr. Donald R. Johnson of Niagara Falls was the president, the annual meeting was held at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa. . The topics included endometrial biopsy for evaluation of menstrual cycle dates (Norman Smith and George Arronet from McGill University); chorionic gonadotrophin for oligospermia, (Dr. Glass from Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Beverly Hills); polycystic ovarian syndrome (Mel Taymor from Beth Israel Hospital in Boston); and secretion of progesterone and aldosterone in women (Sam Solomon, who was then an associate professor at McGill University). Carl Hartman returned as a guest, and gave the Society’s first historical lecture on research in the endocrinology of menstruation during the 1930’s. John Stallworthy, later to become Sir John, presented a paper concerning tuberculosis and fertility, and Don Swartz, together with Jack Walter, Bob Kinch, and Earl Plunkett (all from London Ontario) presented the first paper to this Society on oral contraception.

In 1964 Bob Kinch was the president and the meeting held at the Bayshore in Vancouver, with Fred Bryans in the chair. Ralph Benson (University of Oregon) discussed cervical cerclage, Sam

Behrman reported on the immunology of infertility. David Carr presented his initial data on chromosomal anomalies in early abortion, Beryl Chernick discussed the use of Enovid E., and Dr. Strassman returned to present new data on metroplasty.

The 1965 meeting at the Nova Scotian Hotel in Halifax included three firsts. Doug Cudmore presented the first of only three randomized double-blind clinical trials demonstrating the effectiveness of clomiphene in anovulatory women. Professor Carl Gemzell from Sweden presented the first paper in Canada on human pituitary gonadotrophins for the treatment of infertility. Also, Mel Taymor came back to discuss, for the first time at the Society, the use of radioimmunoassay in the assessment of luteinizing hormone concentration. Joe Tanzman was president that year, but he was ill and George Arronet arranged the meeting.

The 1966 meeting was held at Jasper Park Lodge with George Arronet as president. A second meetings would be held at this location in 1974 with Peter Beck as president. As secretary-treasurer during the years before the 1966, George Arronet helped to develop the Society's yin and yang symbol which still forms the centrepiece of the logo for the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society.

The topics discussed at the 1966 meeting included sequential oral contraceptives (Rollie Suran from Toronto), sex chromosome numbers in thyroid function (Earl Plunkett), placental function in advanced tubal pregnancy (Willard Allan from St. Louis) and issues in contraception (Edward Tyler from Los Angeles). Robert Hall, from Salt Lake City, described the role of culdoscopy in the assessment of infertility. Culdoscopy was a visualisation procedure which required the knee-chest position. Being placed in such a position while asleep on an operating table was, to say the least, a great indignity. With the knee chest position, culdoscopy allowed visualisation of the pelvic contents to an extent that was described by Dr. Hall as valuable and practical, an essential adjunct to the scientific evaluation of diagnostic problems in infertility. Within three years in 1969, Jacques Rioux won the Wyeth prize for his paper on laparoscopy, and culdoscopy was essentially a dead issue.

The 1969 meeting was held at the Palliser Hotel in Calgary, when Don McEwen was president. At that meeting, Betty Poland presented her paper on embryonic hazards and early spontaneous abortion. David Claman of Vancouver would take the award if there were one, for the most imaginative title of any paper. He presented data on the use of Quinesterol and duphaston in the management of dysfunctional uterine bleeding under the title "Problems of the Creative Woman." The Calgary meeting adjourned to the Calgary Stampede on Saturday and Sunday, and resumed at the Banff Springs Hotel on Monday, finishing off with a dinner dance.

The 1974 meeting, when Jacques Rioux was president, was notable for more than its scientific sessions. Held at the Loews Le Concorde in Quebec City, the meeting was a gastronomic triumph, and afterward the society members travelled by bus to the SOGC meeting at Murray Bay. The 1976 meeting was notable not only because Leon Speroff (then in Cleveland) was guest speaker, but because the 160 members of the Canadian Fertility Society requested the president, (Earl Plunkett again) to arrange the next meeting with the Canadian Andrology Society. Several of the presidents who responded to the society's letter have drawn attention to

Earl's longstanding influence in the Society. His involvement in this landmark decision was probably not an accident.

1977-1983 are the La Sapinière years. Many people deserve credit for the success of the Society dating from that time, but the presidents of the CFS and CAS were key people. Jacques Van Campenhout was the president of the Canadian Fertility Society, having attended his first meeting in 1970. Jerry Bain was the president of the Canadian Andrology Society, and these two executives, supported by their separate memberships, established the buoyancy of the Society and the nature of its meetings from 1977 through to the present. Those eight meetings at La Sapinière were associated with more critical scientific content, rigorous vetting and significant interactions between the disciplines. The Canadian Fertility Society presidents were Claire MacLeod, Norman Barwin, Pat Taylor, and Al Yuzpe. The Canadian Andrology Society presidents were Jerry Bain and John Collins, from Ottawa. The list of distinguished visitors during those years included Alvin Paulsen, Ricardo Asch, Roger Short, Don Ackerman, Stephen Franks on two occasions, David Baird, Carl Pauerstein, Michel Ferin, Dan Mishell, Rune Eliason, Alvin Sieglar for the second time, and Nancy Alexander.

The La Sapinière years were notable for the introduction of basic sciences workshops and papers and for parallel discussions of male and female reproduction. They also included the highlight of our Society's history, when the Canadian Fertility Society and the Canadian Andrology Society joined together as the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society in 1982.

The La Sapinière years also saw the introduction of social programmes which helped to unify the diverse membership of the new Society. The talent nights started in 1979, and these activities gave everyone a chance to let their hair down and have fun. No one can remember all of the performances and most of the stories are better forgotten. It was all in good fun, and the fun was enjoyed by no one more than by "La Contesse de La Sapinière", a grand old dowager who visited La Sapinière for two weeks at that time every year, and came to every talent night.

The 1984 Vancouver meeting with Bob Hudson as president was a combined meeting with the British Fertility Society, and the next year, in 1985, the Society went back to La Sapinière with Serge Belisle as president. The Toronto meeting in 1986 with Basil Ho Yuen as president was a conjoint meeting with the American Fertility Society, and the last La Sapinière meeting was held in 1987, with Gilles Bleau as president. During these years the society had seen its attendance rise to outgrow La Sapinière and the 1988 meeting was held in a larger Laurentian hotel. The 1989 meeting was held in Vancouver, with Bob Reid as president is not yet history.

A few guest speakers span twenty years or more of the Society's history. Yves Clermont, for example, spoke on the histopathology of the testicle in 1956, at the third annual meeting in Toronto at the Royal York Hotel. The discussant at that time was Bob Noble, from the Institute of Medical Research at the University of Western Ontario. Dr. Clermont came back in 1961 and again in 1977, when he was Professor of Anatomy at the University of Montreal, to discuss control of spermatogenesis. Other speakers at that 1977 meeting, which was the first meeting with the Canadian Andrology Society at La Sapinière, included Alven Paulsen, Don Ackerman, and Roger Short, who gave his wonderful lecture on the evolution of human reproduction.

Two other guest speakers who span 20-odd years in the history of the Society are Howard and Georgiana Seegar Jones. Dr. Howard Jones spoke in 1959 on surgery for intersexuality. Also on that programme were Murray Barr, discussing the effects of abnormal sex chromosomes on sex differentiation, while Earl Plunkett and Bruce Squires, who later became scientific editor of the Canadian Medical Association Journal, presented a paper on relaxin and the thyroid-gonadal relationships. Georgiana Seegar Jones was a guest of the Society the next year in 1960, discussing the significance and correction of the luteal phase defect. The Joneses came back together in 1980, to discuss in vitro fertilization and the clinical parameters of ovulation.

In reflecting on the history of the Society and reading its meeting agendas, a vivid impression is the durability of the interdisciplinary concept in the study of fertility. The aims of the founding scientists were lofty: to promote investigative and educational work in the field of reproduction. Nevertheless, a diverse body of members continued to pursue the same aims in 1989.

There are few who would question that Lucy Pepin and Janine Gauthier were very important organizational forces in the history of the Society. When Janine took over after Lucy's brief tenure, the Society was just entering a period of growth that required strong administrative skills. As secretary, meeting organizer and social convener, Janine facilitated the successful years at La Sapinière. Many other people have strengthened the framework of this Society and in this brief review of events to 1989 there has been no opportunity to honour all of them. The present membership owe a debt to the many executives, committee members, and others who have contributed through the years.