Antismoking Crusader

In 1939, Dr. Alton Ochsner became one of the first physicians to link smoking with lung cancer. In a report published in *Surgery, Gynecology, and Obstetrics*, he and colleague Dr. Michael DeBakey reported that “inhaled smoke, constantly repeated over a long period of time, undoubtedly is a source of chronic irritation to the bronchial mucosa.” Despite skepticism and, at times, ridicule from the professional medical community, Ochsner became a tireless antismoking crusader, publishing four books on the subject. One of Ochsner’s first questions when he entered the examining room to see a patient was, “Do you smoke?”

“Every type of smoking carries a deadly risk. Tobacco is a loaded weapon. Time pulls the trigger,” he said. Four years after Ochsner’s death, Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals created the Alton Ochsner Award, presented annually to individuals and organizations for their efforts to help people stop smoking.

Pioneering Surgeon

In 1936, Dr. Ochsner became the first surgeon in the Deep South to perform a pneumonectomy as a means of dealing with a malignant bronchial lesion—the tenth pneumonectomy recorded in the world literature. In 1944, he performed the first recorded successful resection of a saccular aneurysm of the aortic arch, and in 1953, he led the surgical team that successfully separated conjoined twins, the first such successful operation in the United States.

Health Care Delivery Visionary

Along with four other founders, Ochsner established the Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans in 1942, bringing a new system of health care delivery to the region. This first group medical practice in the Deep South gave patients the opportunity to see several specialists in one setting and stood in contrast to the independent practices that were the norm at the time.

Rigorous Educator and Prolific Researcher

Ochsner served as chairman of the Department of Surgery at Tulane University School of Medicine, and he emphasized learning from current medical journals over textbooks in an effort to ensure that medical students learned the most up-to-date practices. His infamous bull pen, meant to teach aspiring doctors to think under stress, became the stuff of nightmares which comprises 611 articles.

References


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