

Moments in surgery

Many of our readers are the guardians of lore, amusing or illuminating, about our surgical heritage. This oral history will be lost unless it is captured now. The Editors invite you to submit anecdotes, vignettes, stories of your mentors (great and small), or simply the tall tales you tell your residents about the way it once was.

Stonisms

Bhagwan Satiani, MD, Columbus, Ohio

From the Vascular Services of Ohio, Inc, Columbus

IT IS A BIT UNUSUAL to recount stories about a surgical mentor while he is still living. On the other hand, what better way is there to pay him the tribute he deserves? He has trained generations of surgeons for more than 35 years, branding into them a solid knowledge base and a commitment to excellence in patient care, while also nurturing their technical skills. Mostly, he has encouraged them to think outside of the traditional surgical "box." His vision has often put him at odds with current surgical dogma, only to prove him correct 10 or 20 years later. Examples include his opinions about burn care, intra-abdominal compartment syndrome, omental packing for solid organ injuries, the basis for prophylactic antibiotics, and primary closure of colon injuries.

I was privileged to be his first trauma fellow. At the end of my year, I surprised him at surgical grand rounds, moderated by our chairman, Dr Dean Warren, with a collection of his famous—and some infamous—quotes. All previous surgical residents were asked to recollect some comments made by Dr Harlan Stone (affectionately known as "The Red Baron" or "The Mucker" or "The Wizard"). What brought about such a positive response was the fact that, in spite of being a very tough boss and having a temper that was notori-

ous, he would go to the end of the world to defend his residents if they were picked on by someone other than him. After defending the resident and often putting his own reputation at risk, he would then lambaste the resident in private. A well-known plastic surgery division chief currently at a Midwestern university probably remembers when he took vacation on Dr Stone's service without telling him. Dr Stone made it obvious on rounds that he would be demanding a matching set of reproductive parts when he returned. The vacationer was notified before his return of the welcome waiting for him. On Monday morning, Dr Stone arrived at his office to a set of matching bull reproductive parts in a jar on his desk!

Here then are some "Stonisms":

- I want a 100% doctor, not a 90% doctor.
- Don't play poker with someone else's chips.
- I do not want anyone saying they got away with it.
- If any patient requires antibiotics longer than 10 days, he needs an abscess drained or a new doctor.
- Deliver me from a doctor who only treats electrolytes.
- Sins of omission are far better than sins of commission. I don't want to be the instrument of someone's death.
- You can bleed as rapidly from 5 small blood vessels as you can from 1 large one.
- There are cemeteries full of people who are dead because they were not explored for penetrating trauma.
- Bullets don't travel in straight lines. People are shot in all sorts of positions.
- If I think you are worth saving, I'll cuss at you. The day I ignore you, you are a hopeless case.
- If you want your burn dressings yellow, piss on them.

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Reprint requests: Bhagwan Satiani, MD, Vascular Services of Ohio, Inc, 300 E Town St, Suite 613, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

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- If it takes more than 4 hours to do an operation, the wrong person is doing it.
- The war is won in the wound.
- Lord, deliver me from an intern with a new fountain pen, and a resident who has just read a new article.
- You must have clamped the Prolene, it never breaks.
- I always empty my bladder before I get on the expressway.
- Dammit! If you wanted to kill him, why didn't you just put a gun to his head.
- Don't practice itinerant surgery by transferring your patient to someone else's service.
- You touched that bed and didn't wash your hand. You are a Typhoid Mary.
- If you are too tired to stay awake, go to bed. I don't mind.
- You did what to the wound? You might as well spit in the wound.
- You used what to irrigate the wound? You might as well have used frog urine.
- Alchemy! Pure alchemy!
- God help me if a resident has anosmia. Without the sense of smell, he is useless because he cannot smell the pus.
- If it's one thing I know, it's blood and pus.
- Vent the spleen at least twice a week.
- When you meet a new intern, say to yourself: There goes a killer until I know better.
- If it works at Grady hospital, it will work anywhere.
- Don't tell me what the urine volume is. Tell me about the quality of the urine.
- An attending surgeon should be a walking library, a super technician, and instantly available.

The new incoming house staff was always briefed about his pet peeves before they came on rounds

with Dr Stone. A brief list of the golden rules follows:

- Tell him before you take a vacation on his service.
- When being shouted at, under no circumstances offer any excuse, and learn to recognize the degree of his anger by the following scale:

0-1 Plain sarcasm.

2-3 Irritation and a long discourse.

4-5 Distention of neck veins to mid neck and a red face.

6-7 Neck veins to mastoid, "public hanging," and "We could do without you."

8-9 Exophthalmos: demand for your private parts.

10 Danger, shut up, look at the floor design, and let the chief resident handle it.

- A knowledge of antiques is a big plus. (He is a licensed antique dealer.)

- Try to avoid any physical contact with the staff, especially the nursing staff.

- Examine the patient before calling him; do not call him from home.

- Do not go to sleep in conferences or rounds.

- Chief residents are to wear neckties.

- Never address him by his first name, even if it's the last day of your training.

- Work twice as hard if you come from north of the Mason-Dixon Line or have a beard or moustache.

- Do not talk, whisper, and consult with anyone on rounds.

- Do not try to upstage the senior resident by dealing with "The Mucker."

- Do not try to hide anything from him too often—for example, midline incisions by putting transverse dressings on them. (He hated midline incisions.)

- Do not wear scrubs outside the operating room. You might as well hand in your resignation.

(Dr H. Harlan Stone is currently professor of clinical surgery and program director of the Phoenix Integrated Surgical Residency, an affiliate of the Arizona College of Medicine.)

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