

Editorial

Research in anesthesia and the future of our specialty

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Do not waste your time in compilations, but when your observations are sufficient, do not let them die with you. Study them, tabulate them, seek the points of contact which may reveal the underlying law. Some things can be learned only by statistical comparison.

Sir William Osler (1849–1919)

The duty of academic medical centers is to provide high-quality education, clinical practice, and research, while contributing some of their capacities to the development of the leaders of tomorrow, who will shape our specialty in the future. From my personal view, doing research is the most interesting but most difficult part of the duty, because creative research work may not be produced by efforts alone. There is no doubt that research in anesthesia can influence our understanding of medicine and disease. The importance of research in anesthesia cannot be overemphasized, because research initiatives are vital to the image of the specialty and are essential for its further development as a major medical discipline. Although there has been an enormous contribution of our discipline to the advances in current health care, we should continue with our contributions without being satisfied with the present situation.

There are some concerns about the future of research in anesthesia. In the United States, there has been a great change in the health care system recently, mainly for economic reasons, and there has been a drastic decrease in the number of medical students entering anesthesiology in recent years [1]. In Japan, we have been faced with a problem of a shortage of anesthesiologists, and there is no quick solution for this problem. We have the same problem of rising health care costs as the United States, and the situation of staff shortages in this country might be further worsened in the near future.

Because of the limited number of staff member in academic departments, our faculty members, particularly young staff members, may not find enough time to do research. Academic freedom is no longer a sacred tenet, due to the bad economic conditions these days. It is getting difficult to obtain enough research funding if the subject of the research does not appear to lead to an outcome that would increase business profits. Furthermore, young members of our faculty are under pressure to publish their research work in good journals, because the research can usually be evaluated only by publication. These problems are not unique to our country. For example, in England, many excellent junior research workers are now reluctant to pursue an academic career, and as a result, there is already a shortage of appropriately qualified anesthetists for senior academic posts [2].

However, to deplore the present situation and to worry about the future will solve nothing, and we somehow have to find a better solution. No doubt, our future depends on the younger generation. To recruit promising young investigators, we have to show them the bright side of research. We can show them what great pleasure we can get from doing research and what great satisfaction we can get when we publish good work.

The article by Milic-Emili in this issue of the *Journal of Anesthesia*, entitled “A life of passion and serendipity” [3], shows us an example of how enjoyable the life of a scientist can be. It goes without saying that Dr. Milic-Emili, who introduced the measurements of closing volume and mouth occlusion pressure, is one of the leading scientists in the field of respiratory physiology. Reading his personal history, we find that he had good teachers and worked in close collaboration with many excellent scientists. We also find that many of his achievements were made not simply by accident, but were serendipitous. However, one should not forget that we need some efforts to develop serendipity. In fact, he strongly recommended that young investigators

closely evaluate the available methods and attempt to provide new methodology or, at least, improved techniques, because new methodology is essential for the discovery of new findings. To encourage promising young faculty members to pursue academic careers, and to facilitate the expansion of research in anesthesiology, we must help them in many ways, scientifically and socially. Above all, we have to serve as examples and good preceptors in the disciplines of research.

References

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