

Shakespeare Speaks to Anesthesiologists

To the Editor:—The motto chosen for this year's World Congress of Anaesthesiologists at The Hague consists of a line from Hamlet, Act III, Scene 2: "For some must watch while some must sleep." Though Shakespeare was speaking not of anesthesia but of death, the words he wrote have an extraordinary aptness for our specialty. Little known or quoted, and not previously used verbatim in reference to anesthesiology, they have been appropriated for our special use. For this reason it seems desirable to record how they were uncovered and published.

In 1965 the American University of Beirut was host to a memorable anesthesiology meeting that brought together 125 anesthesiologists from 22 countries. Although I was its principal organizer, the meeting came alive thanks to the enthusiasm of many specialty leaders in medical schools of the region who previously had been working in isolation from their neighbors. Essential financial sponsorship was generously provided by Astra, of Södertälje, Sweden.

From the outset, our plan had been to lay the foundation of a Middle East Society of Anaesthesiologists. But it was not to be. The meeting itself was a great scientific and social success, but delicate political issues derailed our progress toward a formal society. In extended discussions under the chairmanship of World Federation representative Geoffrey Organe, even the most cordial of colleagues could not find ways to circumvent certain national sensitivities in the draft documents. So we bowed to the realities of the region and voted to move forward anyway to promote the functional goals of the proposed Society despite the lack of an agreed constitution. Plans were discussed for future meetings, and I was commissioned to design, edit, and publish a regional journal, the *Middle East Journal of Anaesthesiology*.

At that time it seemed a presumptuous idea; but we did it, encouraged by continuing support from Astra. In designing the journal's cover I sought two things: a logo, for which a stylized poppy was selected, and a motto, some words from classic literature that would express the ideals and spirit of the specialty. But how do you find something like that, a *mot just* that has relevance to sleep or pain? I already knew, and had rejected, Macbeth's "Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care." With no other ideas of my own, I searched in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations; perhaps I could find in it some reference that would serve our purpose.

And so it turned out. In the dictionary under "sleep" was listed a line from Hamlet that I had never noticed before, but which now seemed unbelievably appropriate. I was jubilant. "For some must watch while some must sleep" was printed on the cover of the first issue of the *Middle East Journal of Anaesthesiology* in June 1966, and the motto has remained a feature of the Journal ever since.

The wider recognition now accorded his words would surely have pleased The Bard.

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(Accepted for publication July 1, 1992.)

Contamination of Propofol

To the Editor:—The recent controversy^{1,2} concerning the contamination of propofol has omitted a very important detail. The packaging of the product may be partially at fault. The design of the plastic tray used to protect the glass ampules makes it exceedingly difficult to remove the ampules from the pack without touching the exact point on the neck where the ampules are scored to break. This is in contrast to most other packages of ampules, which allow access to the uppermost part of the break-away top, away from the scored area of the ampule neck.

The fact that this contamination problem has been documented only to occur with propofol, and that in at least one case³ the actual infectious agent was found on the hand of the anesthesia care provider would lend support to this premise. I disagree with Smith and White¹ that the time and expense put into wiping the neck of the propofol ampule with an alcohol wipe is unjustified until supported by clinical trials. I do not need a clinical trial to tell me that glass particles that have come in contact with unprepped human skin are not sterile. The expense of one alcohol wipe and 10 seconds of my time are a worthwhile precautionary measure until a more controlled study is conducted.

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(Accepted for publication July 6, 1992.)