Historical Perspectives of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery: Carl Eggers (1879-1956)

Carl Eggers

Carl Eggers, the 18th president of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery, was born in Oldenburg, Germany. He came to the United States as a teenager, leaving his younger brother and widowed mother in Germany. His ambition was to be a doctor; however, it was necessary to defer his education in order to accumulate sufficient funds to support his education. He was 28 years old when he received his degree in medicine from Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1907. He served his internship at the Lenox Hill Hospital during a period when thoracic surgery was rapidly developing at that hospital. He served in the surgical dispensary and in 1914 became an adjunct surgeon on the ward service. He was promoted to associate surgeon in 1918 and attending surgeon in 1924. During these years, Dr Eggers participated in the growth and development of thoracic surgery. He is credited with performing the fourth successful resection of the esophagus for carcinoma in this country.

In World War I, Dr Eggers received a commission in the Army Medical Corps and served as a consultant in thoracic surgery at The Walter Reed Army Hospital, where he was highly acclaimed as a preceptor and shared with the staff the surgical treatment of multiple cases of chronic empyema employing the Schedes operation. After discharge from the Army Medical Corps, Eggers returned to the Lenox Hill Hospital. Although thoroughly committed to Lenox Hill, he also served on the surgical staffs of New York Skin and Cancer Hospital and Stuyvesant Square Hospital as director of surgery in both institutions. He was a clinical professor of surgery on the medical faculties of both Columbia and New York University and served as a consultant at three other New York hospitals.

Dr Eggers was elected to membership in The American Association for Thoracic Surgery before the first annual meeting in 1918. He served as treasurer, vice president, and in 1936 as president. In 1944 he was made chairman of the Association's committee to consider the establishment of the American Board of Thoracic Surgery and served as the first chairman of the Board. He also was president of the New York Society of Thoracic Surgery.

Dr. Eggers was honored on many occasions for his contributions to the Lennox Hill Hospital as a clinician and also as a teacher. By his example he instilled in those young surgeons who had the opportunity to train under him the importance of being a caring, compassionate physician. To him there were no diseases, only sick people. He admonished his trainees: "Use your head and use your hands, but don't forget your heart." He demonstrated that one did not have to be on the staff of a hospital closely affiliated with a medical school to be at the forefront of surgical education and contribute to surgical advances. He was deeply moved by the decision of the trustees of Lenox Hill Hospital to name the operating suite in the new building, "The Dr Carl Eggers Operating Suite." His

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interest in the training of physicians led to him serving for 6 years as chairman of the Committee on Medical Education of the New York Academy of Medicine. In 1946 he received the Alumni Medal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, an honor he greatly cherished.

Dr Carl Eggers is remembered for his skills and compassion as a clinician, his commitment to the education of

physicians, his contributions to the early development of thoracic surgery, his devotion to the Lenox Hill Hospital, and his service to The American Association for Thoracic Surgery as secretary, treasurer, vice president, and, in 1936, as president.

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