



# Mentored by Me



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## Opinion

Surgery I was given to understand was an art learnt by apprenticeship. When I was choosing a subject for my post-graduation, therefore, the paramount consideration was the mentor. I chose Dr P K Sethi, with whom the Jaipur Foot is associated.

He was a brilliant scholar, with a tremendous knowledge of not just Orthopaedics, but a circumspective understanding of things beyond and apart from Orthopaedic surgery. I think it stemmed from his nature to go into the depths of everything he studied or did. It was this quality which attracted me to him. When, I joined the department as a resident, I became familiar with his habit of asking questions, about anything and everything. For instance, on the ward round he asked me about the Thomas splint, beginning with who was Hugh Owen Thomas. At this point I learnt another trait of his personality. He never answered the question. His standard reply was "Find out". That I discovered was the hard but interesting way of learning. To his credit, he would tell you where to find the answer. 'Go to the library and look up the "Anthology of Orthopaedic Surgeons" by Mercer Rang. He continued with how to measure and prepare a Thomas Splint. Again, no answer. "The best description on how to prepare a Thomas Splint is given in Mary Powell's book on Orthopaedic Nursing" Then he proceeded to elaborate that THAT chapter in the book is written by the eminent T P McMurray, of McMurray's osteotomy. Mary Powell, he told me was the Nursing Superintendent of the Robert Jones Agne Hunt Hospital, London. Robert Jones was the nephew of Hugh Owen Thomas, he went on. Incidentally Agne Hunt was his Nursing Superintendent. This is how his teaching went.

On another ward round he asked me what I was using to dress the infected wounds. I said EUSOL. Prompt came the question "what is EUSOL?" and the supplementary, "what is it made of?" A trip to the library and I discovered it is the Edinburgh University solution and made up of 12.5 gm of bleaching powder and 12.5 gm of boric acid in one-liter distilled water. "What if the wound is green?"

Another trip to the library to learn it means there is pseudomonas infection and 2% acetic acid is to be used for dressing.

Once he asked what are the qualities of a surgeon. I began enunciating he should be quick, operate through a small incision. "No. Go and read Surgery, Orthodox and Heterodox by W Heneage Ogilvie. Sure enough, it had a chapter on the making of a surgeon. It so happened that on one particular operation day the assisting nurse was absent. I laid out the instrument trolley. One look at it and he said 'Do you know the trolley is laid in a definite pattern, so much so that even if the surgeon blindly extends his arm it should reach the instrument he wants?' "Indeed I did not, at which he promptly referred me to R J Brigden's 'Operating Theatre technique', which was a complete guide to theater instruments and how to lay them, and even described the draping of patients.

He had mandated that the resident assisting him in surgery must study each operation carefully prior, and then take out all the instruments required for the operation for autoclaving. This ensured that we studied each operation every time right from incision to closure, an effort tremendously useful in the post graduate examination. He was absolutely sure about every person's status and standing. For instance, when I asked him to teach me about plaster technique he referred me to the plaster technician, with the words, "He applies more plasters than I do". Once he humiliated me in front of the physiotherapist. Then, when we were alone he told me "I deliberately did it to offend you. Now you will endeavor to know more than him, as you should". This is how he mentored me.

There is a lifetime of such mentoring, which would require a volume. My reason for putting these down on paper is to try and commit the younger generation to the same type of mentoring as I went through, and tried to do in my turn. Somehow, I feel subsequent generations are losing the art of apprenticeship, in their business to make money. No longer is the pride felt, or need felt either to, feel the gratification of pointing to a student "mentored by me."



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