Britain and America join forces to celebrate 150th anniversary of leading Royal anaesthetist

Anaesthetists working in research face difficult challenges, including conflicts of interest and legal issues, according to Professor Ronald D Miller, who will present this year’s John Snow Memorial Lecture to mark the 150th anniversary of the pioneering Royal physician’s death.

Professor Miller, from the Department of Anesthesia and Perioperative Care at the University of California, and author of the leading textbook *Miller’s Anesthesia*, says that they also have a major role to play in driving future healthcare improvements.

Speaking on the last day of the Annual Congress of the London-based *Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland* (September 17-19), he will also pay tribute to the past contributions made by anaesthetists to medical research and urge future developments that he believes will have a major impact on medicine.

“The specialty of anaesthesia developed because of its fundamental contributions to healthcare, including the prevention of pain from surgery, respiratory and critical care medicine, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and pain medicine” says Professor Miller, who is Chair of the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ task force that is helping to define the future direction of the specialty.

“Through these contributions anaesthesia became an important component of the medical profession.

“To continue our position in medicine, our intellectual foundation must be maintained and augmented mainly via research. No matter what role they play, all members of an anaesthetic department must contribute to the past intellectual development of anaesthesia as a basis for outlining the future approaches in research, including basic science, applied, transitional, clinical, educational and economic research.

“The challenges to the anaesthetist-scientist include evaluation, funding, conflicts of interest, legal and fraud.
“The future of the anaesthetic profession is mainly with its intellectual resources, especially research as the basis of improved patient care, and to have a major impact on the future of medicine overall.”

The annual memorial lecture pays tribute to Victorian pioneer Dr John Snow (1813 to 1858), who is widely credited with the development of safe anaesthesia. It has been presented every year since the centenary of his death in 1958.

In 1847, Dr Snow, who worked as a specialist at some of London’s top hospitals, developed safe and effective inhalers for chloroform and ether, teaching others the technique through lectures and papers in medical journals.

His most famous patient was Queen Victoria, who asked Dr Snow to administer his chloroform technique during the births of Prince Leopold and Princess Beatrice – the last of her nine children - in 1853 and 1857.

But his achievements go beyond anaesthesia.

Dr Snow, who was born in York, discovered that cholera was a water-borne disease following his observations during the 1848 and 1854 outbreaks, but the medical profession was slow to accept his findings. He is also seen as one of the founders of intensive care medicine.

“Anaesthesia has come a long way since Dr Snow made his ground-breaking discovery and we are delighted that this year’s memorial lecture is being delivered by Professor Miller, who is a highly prestigious member of the international anaesthesia community” says Dr David Whitaker, President of the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland.

“International collaboration is an essential element of our work and Professor Miller’s work with the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ task force exemplifies the way forward as much as Dr Snow’s work defines how our profession has developed since his pioneering work with safe anaesthesia.”

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Further information
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Notes to editors

• **John Snow** (1813-1858) was born in York and apprenticed to a surgeon in Newcastle upon Tyne. He gained a Bachelor of Medicine and Doctorate of Medicine from the University of London and was a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of both the Society of Apothecaries and the Royal College of Physicians. Dr Snow worked as a general practitioner in Soho and at top London hospitals, including St George’s, Kings and University College Hospital. His career and work are extensively documented on the internet.
• The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland is a leading representative body for anaesthetists in the UK and overseas and is one of the UK’s largest single grant providers for anaesthetic research. It currently has around 10,000 members. www.aagbi.org

• Anaesthetists are specialist doctors involved in the care of two-thirds of all hospital patients. Their expertise extends beyond the main operating theatre to acute and chronic pain management, leading resuscitation teams, managing Intensive Care Units, working in maternity units, accident and emergency departments and radiology, the care of some dental patients and the transfer of critically ill patients.