Harris Peyton Mosher, MD: The Educator, Artist, and Pioneer behind the Mosher Award

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Abstract

Harris P. Mosher, MD, was a pioneer in the development of modern-day otolaryngology. The prestigious Mosher Award was named after him and is awarded annually for recognition of excellence in otolaryngology clinical research. Dr Mosher’s contributions to the field include innovative research, technique and instrument development, and advancement of all national otolaryngology societies that function to this day. He was regarded as an expert and fore-runner in sinus anatomy and started the first sinus anatomy course in the United States. He was also the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Royal Society of Medicine of London’s Semon Medal as well as the American Laryngological Association Gold Medal. The yearly administration of the Mosher award highlights the legacy and passion of Dr Mosher for the advancement of the field of otolaryngology.

Keywords

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Harris Peyton Mosher was born in Woodsford, Maine, in 1867 to Andrew and Julia Mosher. His father was a civil engineer and inventor by trade, and his mother was a gifted painter and musician. Having both a scientific and artistic upbringing helped to pave the way for his later infatuation with head and neck anatomical sketches. He earned his BA degree in 1892 and his MD degree in 1896, both from Harvard University. His interest in otolaryngology began through a volunteer opportunity for the laryngological clinic at Massachusetts General Hospital during his surgical internship.

At this time in medical education, there were no formal postgraduate residency programs in the United States. Dr Mosher instead sought out some of the best otolaryngologists and clinics in Germany to work under during his postgraduate training years. These included Jansen in Berlin and Grunert in Halle. Following this training, he returned to Boston in 1902 and began teaching anatomy at Harvard University. His primary area of anatomical interest involved the paranasal sinuses, leading him to pioneer the first sinus anatomy course in the United States, nicknamed “Mosher’s course.” This arduous training course was attended by clinicians all over the world and involved drawings and models prepared by students to test their understanding of head and neck anatomy. His infatuation with the ethmoidal labyrinth led him to occasionally toss a ball of clay at one of his pupils and make them close their eyes and sculpt a model of the structure by hand (Figure 1).

Among his many noteworthy achievements throughout his career, Dr Mosher authored 88 otolaryngology papers. Many of the illustrations present in his papers were drawn by him and are a testament to his artistic talent. His creativity also inspired him to create many revolutionary medical instruments, including the Mosher Life-Saving Tube. This tube is a precursor to many of the modern devices used for emergency airway management. It is thought that this invention saved many lives during outbreaks of diphtheria. Other noteworthy instrument inventions among the 15 he pioneered throughout his career include the safety pin extractor, which allowed for the closure and extraction of safety pins swallowed by babies. Many credit the expansion of endoscopic instruments to the influence of Dr Mosher.

It has been stated that by the end of his career, Dr Mosher possessed every honor possible in the field of otolaryngology. These included, in chronological order, president of the Triological Society and American Laryngological Association in 1920, president of the American Broncho-Esophagological Association in 1921, founder and president of the American Board of Otolaryngology in 1924 (and served as president until 1947), president of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology in 1929, and president of the American Otological Society in 1938. He was even

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appointed as a fellow of the Royal Medical Society of London and medical societies of Paris and Vienna. He was awarded the Gold Medal from the American Laryngological Association, a service medal from the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology, and the highly prestigious Semon Medal from the Royal Society of Medicine of London.1-3

Dr Mosher died in 1954, but his career and contributions to the field of otolaryngology will forever be remembered and held in the utmost regard. He is the true definition of a trailblazer and a leader whom every physician can aspire to be like. Each year, the Triological Society appoints a prestigious award named the “Harris P. Mosher Award” to honor the man who gave so much of himself to further the field of otolaryngology.3

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**References**


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