

# The Wonderful World of Medicine

## Off the Beaten Path: The Splinter and the Cervix

By Nathalie Coeller

I just stood back and watched.

I was on my first day of labor and delivery at "Hospital Maternidad," the free women's hospital in Quito, Ecuador. I had landed in Quito a few days prior, planning to spend two months learning Spanish and exploring the Ecuadorian healthcare system. My Spanish was coming along nicely; I had a vocabulary of at least 25 words and could put them together in insightful phrases like, "I am medical student. I learn Spanish. You are doctor?" It's a good way to make a lasting impression on a new attending.

The attending physician for that first day was Dr. Molina, well known among the American students for his curiosity about the United States and his penchant for flirting with all the American women.

His laboring patients were lined up in a row of seven or eight gurneys, with no privacy or space between them. He started at one end, unceremoniously pulled up the woman's gown and proceeded to check her cervix to ascertain her dilatation and effacement. He then turned to his entourage of students, interns, residents and nurses and asked for an instrument with which to rupture the woman's amniotic sac. No plastic amniotic hook for him—that would be much too easy. Instead, this was a contest in which every patient was a chance for the designated student to display her ingenuity. Each time, the student came back with a more creative option for rupturing the sac than the previous student had procured. First a long, inverted cotton swab; then half of a broken Kocher clamp, properly autoclaved of course, although perhaps a tad rusty. However, the next student was nothing short of genius as she handed Dr. Molina... a tongue depressor? I know I'm not the brightest apple in the medical school barrel, but I was struggling to see what the adenoids had to do with the cervix at this juncture. As I wracked my brain for the connection, Dr. Molina solved the mystery by neatly breaking off the end of the depressor, leaving a sharp, albeit jagged, edge. With no lubrication or other preparation, he inserted the depressor into the woman and was rewarded with the anticipated gush of fluid. I stared, aghast, but unfortunately did not know the Spanish words for "leave," "splinters," "in," and "vagina."

Not all of my encounters were quite as shocking as this one. Much of the time I was impressed by the quality of care that patients received, despite the lack of resources and funding that physicians encountered. Nevertheless, a new culture always brings some surprises and questions, and I was fortunate to be in a program where each week we would discuss our experiences with an Ecuadorian physician. This was crucial to understanding and appreciating the differences, rather than just reacting to them.

Next month... tales from the ED.

## The Monthly Motivator Putting Faces on Places: Charles Phillips Emerson

by Pamela Cates

It is my pleasure to continue the Monthly Motivator column for the 2004-2005 school year! For those of you who are reading this column for the first time, it was laid on my heart to start this column last year with the intention to bring encouragement and inspiration to all of us as we continue on this journey of becoming a physician.

It is my hope that everyone who reads this column will be encouraged, inspired, and motivated to continue on the paths that are set before us. Remember that no matter what situation you are in, it's your moment to shine!

### Your Moment to Shine

No matter how many times you may have fallen short in the past, you can go positively forward right now. No matter how often you've chosen a path that has led you astray, you can now choose to move straight ahead.

Do not be dismayed by what has already come to pass. For now you can choose to live the best of your possibilities.

Don't waste a lot of time being disappointed by the shortcomings in your past. Now is your opportunity to move beyond them.

Whatever has been, has now been and is finished. What is to be, is yours now to choose. Now is the moment that you can influence. Now is the time to take positive action.

Get up and go forward from whatever may have happened before. Now is truly your moment to shine.

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## Putting Faces on Places: Charles Phillips Emerson

by Michael Boger

Charles Phillips Emerson was born in Massachusetts to a pioneer family, relatives of well-known philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. He attended Amherst College and later Johns Hopkins medical school, graduating in 1899. He was the top student in his class all four years and was appointed to the position of Intern to Osler—the most coveted position of the time. Following advice from Osler he spent the next three years in Europe studying medical techniques in Germany, Switzerland and France. On returning to the U.S. he took a teaching position at Cornell University where he



1932 he remained at IUSM as a member of the faculty, writing *Reminiscences of Sir William Osler*. He died at age 66 of bronchial pneumonia. Emerson Hall was named in his honor.



## African Americans in Medicine:

### James Derham

by Aaron M.  
Anderson

Born a slave in Philadelphia, James Derham was owned by three different physicians. His last owner moved to New Orleans and encouraged Derham to study medicine. During this time, Derham worked as a medical assistant for his owner. By 1783 he had saved enough money to purchase his freedom. He did not run to the North, but instead remained in New Orleans and became the first African American to practice medicine. By the age of 26, Derham's practice earned him over \$3,000 annually. That was quite a large salary for an African American at that time.

Derham's medical practice included both white and black patients. In 1788, Dr. Benjamin Rush, the father of American medicine, read the College of Physicians in Philadelphia a paper by James Derham describing the treatment for diphtheria. After encouragement from Dr. Rush, Derham moved his practice to Philadelphia. He gained the respect of his colleagues and became nationally renowned as a specialist in throat disorders.

James Derham was not professionally trained in a medical school. In 1801, this fact kept him from continuing his profession. Although he had been practicing medicine for 18 years, he was stripped of his career because he did not have a traditional medical license. During that time, it was illegal to teach a slave to read, and blacks were not allowed entrance into American medical schools. Not having a degree in medicine, he was forced to close his doors as a practicing physician. The life of James Derham and his experiences after that point are lost to history.

To all medical students, minority or not, this is a story that can inspire you. To know that you are capable of comprehending medicine and have a career waiting for you should push you to keep going.

