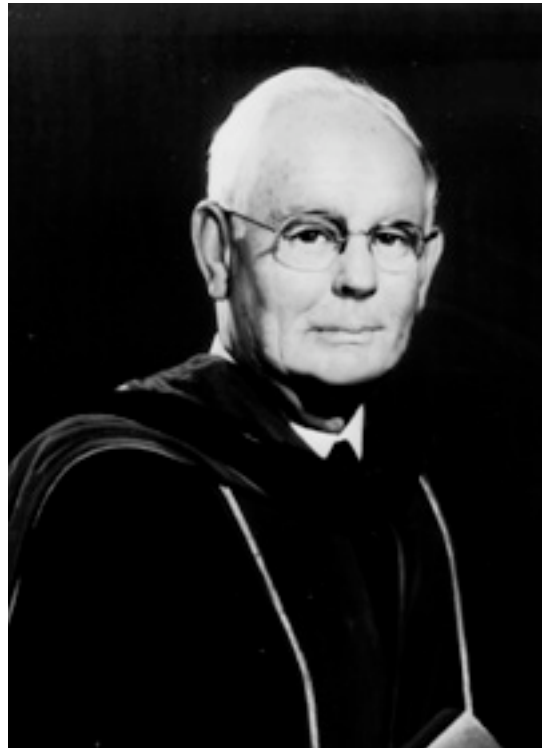


Interviews with
J. ENGLEBERT DUNPHY M.D.

UCSF SURGERY IN THE POSTWAR YEARS:

BUILDING AN EXEMPLARY DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY



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THE UCSF ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
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Interview History

This is an interesting story. At the first faculty meeting that we attended, Holly was already seated, the room was about half-full and he was sitting all alone. I went down and sat beside him, put my arm around him and said 'how are you' and talked. The next day, the dean, Bill Reinhardt, said, "You know, it was an interesting faculty meeting. There was a lot of comment." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You know, never in history could they remember the Professor of Medicine and the Professor of Surgery sitting side-by-side. What's more, obviously talking very intently and enjoying it." And I said, "What was the reaction?" He said, "I think the reaction was, 'What do you think those rascals are up to?'"

J. Englebert Dunphy, M.D.

The story of postwar surgery at UCSF is in large part a Dunphy story, since he was the first chair in decades to be recruited from outside of the pool of faculty candidates already at UC. The Department of Surgery could well claim national recognition in the early twentieth century due to the singular eminence of neurosurgeon Howard C. Naffziger and the reputation of his training program, but by mid-century the entire school had begun to suffer from its provincial tone and the need for reform. When Dunphy came to Parnassus in the mid-1960s, he sensed the opportunity to lift the UC School of Medicine out of its regional doldrums and, along with a handful of new recruits, brought innovations to the institution that have an ongoing impact in the twenty-first century. Already mature in his academic career when he agreed to come to California, Dunphy brought both collegial respect and luster to UCSF and his amiable personality smoothed the way through the difficult transitional years, as the testimony of virtually every surgeon in this interview series reveals.

As part of our background search for the surgery history project, we located this short discussion in the UCSF Archives and Special Collections, and we have presented it here along with the selected comments from Dr. Dunphy's many friends and colleagues. We are fortunate that a predecessor to our oral history program, Rita Carroll, conducted this oral history interview in the late 1970s when Dr. Dunphy was new to retirement.

J. Englebert Dunphy served as chair of surgery at UC from 1964 through 1975 and his leadership continues to inspire generations of surgeons. A telling example of his modesty was his reluctance to rename the honorary Naffziger Surgical Society for himself, fearing that such a move might disrupt the cohesion of the group. We trust that this volume will serve as an informative and fitting memorial to this great UCSF educator, and the reader is reminded that dozens of cartons of his administrative papers were donated to the UCSF Library archives for future research.

Guest Introduction

J. Englebert Dunphy, MD

-- Lloyd H. Smith, Jr., MD

It is a privilege to be asked to write a few introductory remarks for this oral history from and about Bert Dunphy. I shall not attempt to describe yet once again his genesis as one of the nation's most eminent academic surgeons. This emerges quite clearly from the interview itself, from his curriculum vitae, and especially from the appended essays of remembrance and appreciation that conclude this volume. These essays, written by long-term friends and associates, reflect the special qualities of this uniquely gifted physician far better than can I. It remains only to describe in brief his remarkable impact on the UCSF School of Medicine a generation ago at a time when it was being rapidly transformed from an admirable but regional institution to one of national and international eminence.

Bert Dunphy and I both arrived at UCSF in 1964 as Chairmen of the Departments of Surgery and of Medicine, respectively. Bert, however, was by far my senior in years, in experience, and in attainments in his discipline. Already he had served as President of the American College of Surgeons, Chairman of the American Board of Surgery, Chief of Surgery at a premier Harvard teaching hospital (the Boston City Hospital), and Chairman of the Department of Surgery at the University of Oregon School of Medicine. In fact, he was known to me as an admired and distinguished professor at Harvard Medical School while I was still a medical student in that institution. It was, therefore, with some awe and trepidation that I approached the challenge of serving as his colleague from being leader of the other one of the two largest and most important clinical departments in the UCSF School of Medicine.

My concerns were quickly revealed to be unfounded. With his boundless exuberance and good will, so well described by his friends in this volume, Bert immediately took me under his wing, i.e., a subtle but effective program of neonatal care of a newly minted and untried Chairman. We became immediate friends and remained so until his untimely death. Traditionally at UCSF an enduring hostility had existed between the Departments of Surgery and of Medicine, based on personality incompatibilities stretching back for at least a long generation. That unfortunate legacy was immediately dispelled. As a result, we were able to work in harmony with other key campus leaders, such as Julius Comroe and Dean William Reinhardt, to begin transforming the cultural norm and level of performance expectation at this venerable academic health science center, at that very year celebrating its 100th anniversary. These initial few years were marked by political perturbations through which new administrative leadership for the campus was finally obtained despite the background turbulence in the University at large. These events have been described in this oral history as well as that of others who lived through that difficult but defining period.

As I think back with affection about this great man, several words come to mind — competence, vision, gusto, and humanity. One need not dwell on his professional competence.

Clearly, he reached the top of his discipline as one of the nation's most renowned surgeons. His appointment at UCSF immediately and dramatically increased the prestige of his department. More important for the campus as a whole was his overarching vision of what UCSF could become and the steps necessary for attaining that goal. He was a pioneer in creating the concept of developing a balanced academic program in all three of the participating hospitals of that era — Moffitt, the San Francisco General Hospital, and the Ft. Miley VA Medical Center. The latter two institutions had been previously treated as peripheral entities and worthy of minimal attention. Bert Dunphy brought to these institutions future national leaders in surgery — William Silen, William Blaisdell, Laurence Way, and many others. In his own department he created pioneering new programs such as organ transplantation and wound healing. Through personal magnetism he quickly elevated his department's postgraduate training program to one of the most competitive in the nation. These are but a few examples of his vigorous leadership accomplishments within his department. Simultaneously, as the senior clinical academic figure at UCSF, he was constantly in the forefront of influencing overall campus policies and in recruiting outstanding colleagues for other departments from around the nation. Without his vision and vigor at this critical period, it is highly unlikely that the resultant momentum would have been created at UCSF that has carried through for the subsequent generation.

High competence and exceptional vision can exist uncoupled from social skills, but that would not be Bert Dunphy. Bert loved life in all of its forms and ramifications and radiated this love with gusto and puckish Irish humor. Few could resist his charm and ebullience, which constantly enlivened and enlarged his environment for the benefit of those who were fortunate to share it with him. Tales of his good humored pranks and stories abound and are still told and retold by those who knew him. In his company one felt expanded in scope while simultaneously amused by his felicitous remarks, often teasing in nature but never with a residual sting.

There was yet another dimension to this multifaceted man. Beyond professional competence, vision concerning academic values and their application in institution building, and remarkable energy and gusto, Bert Dunphy was a deeply humane individual. Although he was willing to discuss religion with a characteristic light touch, his Catholicism was very important to him. He was a splendid physician, adored by his patients. During my years as Chairman of the Department of Medicine I constantly referred students and young physicians to his splendid speech and subsequent article "On Caring for the Patient with Cancer." I have asked that this article be included in this volume. This wise, balanced, and deeply felt statement gains yet further relevance since it was written at a time when Bert Dunphy was facing his own ordeal of the metastatic cancer that led finally to his death.

This oral history is a useful contribution to understanding UCSF as an institution in change in the 1960's. It is also, in its supplement, a statement of deep appreciation for the life of a remarkable and beloved human being.

APRIL 15, 1977

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