

## Book Review

### Critique de livre

**APHORISMS & QUOTATIONS FOR THE SURGEON.** Edited by M. Schein. 276 pp. Ifm Publishing, Shrewbury, Shropshire, UK. 2003. £30. ISBN 1903378117

Surgeons tend to economize on words, preferring action to talking, so it is reasonable to expect that surgical education would have a rich history of pithy maxims or aphorisms. The editor of this book has chosen and presented a great variety of quotations, carefully indexed by author and by subject.

The subject headings, 94 in all, include such topics as hemorrhoids, old patients, old and young surgeons, truth and SICU. The reader who wishes to find an accurate quo-

tation to embellish a lecture or seminar, or to enliven the conversation in the operating room, will be sure to find some appropriate pieces. In fact, the piece may be found several times, because the publisher has chosen to reprint favourite items in marginal columns, at the end of chapters and with cartoon drawings.

As well as the words of surgeons, there are comments about the surgical profession by literary giants such as George Bernard Shaw and Mark Twain. The humorous quotations are mostly from authors other than surgeons, poking fun at surgical manners and idiosyncracies. It is apparent that many of the teaching maxims are no longer appropriate, but the ele-

ment of truth survives in a few. Not very many are really worth remembering by surgical trainees of today, but they give some insight about the working of the surgeon's mind over the centuries. Most dictionaries of quotations can be browsed with delight and a few good laughs. The laughs in this text are few and far between — too many surgeons come across as pompous curmudgeons interested in promoting the idea of their own importance to the human race, and that is rather depressing.

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