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Presentation of *Linacre Quarterly* Award to Sister Anna Polcino, M.D.

by John P. Mullooly, M.D.

Westin Hotel
Chicago, Illinois
September 12, 1986

It is always a great joy for me each year to make the *Linacre Quarterly* award presentation. But this year, it is an especially great honor for me. It is being given to a person not only for the article she wrote, but also in recognition of what she is and what she has done in her life under the divine influence and love of the God Who made her. Sister Anna Polcino, a member of the Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries of Philadelphia, is truly a remarkable woman. Raised in the Depression by her father (her mother having died when Sister Anna was four), she proved to be an exceptionally bright student, graduating from J.W. Hallahan Catholic Girls' High School in Philadelphia and later obtaining her A.B. degree from Immaculata College with a major in biology and a minor in chemistry.

This young graduate entered the Medical Mission Sisters after college. Two years later, she entered the Medical College of Pennsylvania and obtained her medical degree in 1955. Internship ensued at St. Francis Hospital, followed by surgical residency training at St. Agnes Hospital and Hahnemann Medical College Hospital in Philadelphia.

This dedicated nun and surgeon then embarked on a most illustrious career, and in her life, we see the journey of a soul imbued with the love of God and her fellowman. With zest and zeal, Doctor Polcino went to Karachi, Pakistan, and became Medical Director and Chief (and only) Surgeon at her order's hospital there. She spent five years doing all types of general surgical operations, orthopedic surgery, pediatric surgery and obstetrics. She was a jack of all trades, also doing gynecologic surgery, ENT surgery, urological surgery and even chest surgery. Last, but not least, she was also doing neurology and psychiatry, doing general medicine and treating tropical diseases.

During this five-year period, she performed over 5,000 operations and some 3,000 deliveries. Also during this time, like every good physician, she trained Pakistani physicians and nurses, preparing them for study abroad in England and the United States. The good sister was then transferred to Bangladesh, where she continued her surgical and obstetrical work (1,000 operations and over 2,000 deliveries in the course of one year). Returning to Karachi, for two more years, she continued at the same digs until in 1968, she came down with amoebic and viral hepatitis and arthritis, and was sent back to the USA for convalescence. At this time, a change took place in our good Sister and a change of focus ensued. Perhaps the Spirit was moving deep in her soul. Perhaps it was a deepening awareness of something more having to be done which beckoned her into psychiatry. She embarked on a second career, taking her psychiatric training at Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts. And here we see the flowering and evolution of this zealous nun coming to fruition. While still a resident in psychiatry, she set up a mental health clinic in Worcester and it soon flourished. She set up several more mental health clinics and soon had a network in 15 towns in the Blackstone Valley, giving counselling to the patients in the various communities.

At the same time, Sister Anna founded the Consulting Center for Clergy and Religious of the Diocese of Worcester and directs it to this day.

She does this on her own free time and on weekends. It was established to meet the needs of the Roman Catholic priests, sisters and brothers who had emotional, mental and vocational problems following Vatican II. Innovative and inspired Sister Anna developed a psychotheological approach in psychotherapy to address the spiritual/theological problems of her patients. Out of this work, she became the Founder and International Psychiatric Director of the House of Affirmation International Therapeutic Center for Clergy and Religious in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. It is a residential center for the religious professional with emotional and vocational problems. In 1978, Sister Anna's work spread to California, Missouri, Florida and England, where similar residential facilities were set up.

As if these endeavors were not enough, this indefatigable laborer in the vineyard at the same time is involved in teaching, lecturing, spiritual guidance and writing. In recognition of her work and accomplishments,

many honors have come her way ranging from listing in *Who's Who in the United States* to the *International Who's Who of Intellectuals*. She has been honored as "Woman of the Year" by the city of Worcester and many other organizations. Honorary degrees have come to her from many colleges and universities. Her publications are numerous and primarily center upon the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of clergy and religious.

Sister Anna Polcino in her own life has fulfilled a desperate need in this arena and I have witnessed this in a priest who has benefitted from her loving, deep spiritual and psychiatric care. He came back from the House of Affirmation a changed man, deeply in love with his vocation and himself as a person. Sister Anna and her work represent the very best of the blending of the scientific and spiritual and psychological disciplines.

The spirit has found a willing and loving heart in her and has wrought great things in her life. It is with a great sense of humility and a touch of pride that the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds presents to you, Sister Anna, the *Linacre Quarterly* award for 1985, for your article, "The Role of Religion in the Practice of Medicine", published in *Linacre Quarterly* in May 1985. This article was the keynote address of our NFCPG meeting in Philadelphia in 1984.

—John P. Mullooly, M.D.
Editor, *Linacre Quarterly*