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Charles A. Kane

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The John J. Larkin Memorial Award of the Guild of St. Luke of Boston

A SHORT HISTORY

CHARLES A. KANE, M.D.*

Concerned with the need to stimulate original, basic research in human biology and medicine among young Catholic scientists and physicians and in honor of the memory of the late John J. Larkin, Jr., M.D., the Guild of St. Luke of Boston in 1950 established a memorial grant-in-aid. It is the purpose of this brief communication to review the philosophy behind this award, to mention some of the problems attendant on its administration, and to evaluate critically its successes and failures over the past decade and a half.

I. DR. JOHN J. LARKIN, JR. (1914-1949)

On August 26, 1949, at the age of thirty-five, while vacationing with his family, Dr. Larkin was accidentally drowned, terminating a career of great promise as a medical investigator.

Educated at St. Francis Xavier School in Roslindale, Mass., Boston College High School, and Boston College—where he graduated *magna cum laude* in 1935—he went on to Harvard Medical School, completing his course of studies in 1939.

Following this, he was an intern on the First (Tufts) Medical Service at Boston City Hospital; then, resident-physician at Westfield State Sanatorium; and finally resident-pathologist at New York Post-Graduate Hospital through December 1942.

He completed his Army Medical Corps career in August 1946 with the rank of Major, having served as Chief of Laboratory Service in several hospitals here and in Europe.

From September 1946 until his untimely death three years later, he was pathologist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Brighton, Massachusetts, and Chief of Staff at Holy Ghost Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

On September 28, 1950, a tablet was dedicated in his honor at Holy Ghost Hospital. On this occasion Dr. H. Edward MacMahon, Professor of Pathology at Tufts University School of Medicine, reviewed Dr. Larkin's career as an administrator, diagnostician, and investigator (antibiotic and cancer research). In closing his remarks, Dr. MacMahon lamented the early demise of "a gifted teacher, a young man of great promise, and a loyal friend."

In addition to numerous other professional societies, Dr. Larkin had taken an active interest in the Guild of St. Luke.

II. THE AWARD

The precise qualifications for the Larkin Award were not clearly defined until the Executive Council of the Guild formulated the following criteria in November 1956: *The award shall be given only to a Catholic who is a native of the Archdiocese of Bos-*

ton and who is presently studying either at the premedical, medical school, internship, or resident level. The geographical and educational limitations have proved less troublesome to the various Award Committees than the religious specification. Because of persistent rumblings of discontent, beginning in 1960, the posters announcing the award included no religious requirement. This policy still obtains despite almost regular reconsideration by the Executive Councils of the Guild of the pros and cons of this position. The decision to omit a statement stipulating that "non-Catholics need not apply" is worthy of note when one reflects that Irish immigrants in this city a hundred years ago were dealt with in very arbitrary fashion! The current poster—which is sent out to all three local medical schools and to more than one hundred hospitals, colleges, and laboratories in Eastern Massachusetts in the early Fall of each year—is reproduced in Figure 1.

Table I summarizes available data gleaned from the files of the various Award Chairmen to the best of the present writer's detective ability. As shown, the first (1951) recipient of the Larkin Award (in the sum of \$500) was Dr. Alfred Donovan (currently practicing in Wakefield, Mass.) who collaborated with Drs. Joseph M. Foley and William C. Moloney in describing a zinc sulfate technique for precipitating spinal fluid globulins. Neurologists are grateful for a modification of this technique which has proved very useful in the differential diagnosis of patients presenting with syndromes suggesting multiple sclerosis. Thus, a figure of more than fifteen per cent (15%) *gamma* globulin in a spinal fluid with relatively normal total protein is highly suggestive of multiple sclerosis.

In 1954, three applications were received and the award went to Mr.

Laszlo Varga, the third year student at Harvard Medical School, for his project on protein-polysaccharide interaction as studied by ultra-centrifugation.

In November 1957 the Executive Council of the Guild, "disturbed and disappointed" by the poor response to the original award, appointed a new four-man Award Committee. This committee was authorized to increase the annual stipend to \$1000 and was charged to "seek applications from Catholics as widely as possible." The chairman was Dr. Howard J. Christian (pathologist at Carney Hospital, Dorchester); the other members were Dr. Joseph M. Foley (now chairman and professor, Department of Neurology, Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio), Dr. William Moloney (director, Tufts Hematology Laboratory, Boston City Hospital), and Dr. Robert Spellman (urologist and visiting surgeon, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Brighton)—all physician-investigators of experience.

The practice of presenting the award at the time of the Laetare Dinner was instituted to formalize and lend appropriate dignity to the project. More recently, the award has been given at the time of the annual Spring Festival Charity Dinner Dance, sponsored by the Guild and graced by His Eminence, Richard Cardinal Cushing.

Such was the stimulus generated by this group that in 1958 an all-time "high" of six applications were received for review. This committee served with distinction until 1960 when Drs. Edward Mahoney, James O'Hare, Francis Pomer, and Robert Scully served for one year as an interim committee.

In the fall of 1960, the Executive Council (Francis W. Drinan, M.D., president) appointed the writer to the chairmanship of the Award Commit-

*Professor of Neurology and Chairman of the Department of Neurology, Boston University School of Medicine; President-Elect, American Academy of Neurology; Chairman, Larkin Award Committee; member, Guild of St. Luke of Boston.

tee. The other six members appointed by the chairman who willingly agreed to serve and who have done so, cheerfully and well, over the past four years are: Dr. Jane Desforges, Tufts Medical School faculty affiliation, Boston City Hospital, whose field of interest is hematology; Dr. James Graham, Tufts faculty, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, pathology; Dr. Stephen Kuffler, Harvard faculty, neurophysiology; Dr. Eugene Laforet, Boston University faculty, Massachusetts Memorial Hospital, thoracic surgery; Dr. Joseph O'Connor, Tufts faculty, Winchester Hospital, internal medicine, and Dr. Cornelius Shea, Tufts faculty, Carney Hospital, general surgery.

After much deliberation, the ground-rules for making the award were modified as follows:

a) although the prime purpose is to stimulate Catholics in original biomedical research, non-Catholics are not excluded from applying;

b) the committee shall be free to judge each project submitted entirely on its individual merit;

c) the stipend is not intended to purchase laboratory supplies or equipment, but rather to furnish some small measure of financial security to the recipient, who might otherwise be required to take another job.

d) case reports, analysis of clinical data, clinical evaluation of drugs, and reviews of the literature—unless associated with some creditable original research—shall be excluded from consideration.

The award committee has enjoyed the whole-hearted cooperation of our various Executive Councils and is most grateful to the sponsors who have agreed to supervise the work of the successful recipients. We feel, therefore, that the modest efforts of the award committees over the past 14 years have been worthwhile (Table II lists printed scientific articles which are a direct result of the Larkin Award). Last year's recipient, Dr. E. James Potchen, had an opportunity to present his paper before members of the Guild and other interested persons at the McElroy Commons of Boston College. This was suggested and arranged by Dr. Eugene Laforet, a member of the award committee and chairman of the Guild's Lecture Series, with great success.

With a plethora of government-supported research monies (reaching down even into the first two years of medical school), it may well be time to reappraise not our purposes but our stipulations in making future awards. To be specific, we feel that perhaps we should solicit more interest from *premedical* areas, such as college students engaged in original research in biology or "life-sciences," preferably with some pertinence to human ills or physiology.

In summary, we feel that awards of this type are worthy undertakings of such groups as Guilds of Catholic Physicians. We encourage other Guilds to consider our history and we offer to provide full measure of our own experience in initiating any such project elsewhere.

TABLE I.

SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS FOR THE LARKIN AWARD (1951-1964)

YEAR	TOTAL APPLICATIONS	RECIPIENT	HOSPITAL OR SCHOOL	PROJECT
1951	(?)	Dr. Alfred Donovan	Boston City Hospital	"Precipitation of Cerebrospinal Fluid Globulin by Zinc Sulfate"
1954	(3)	Mr. Laszlo Varga (medical student)	Harvard Medical School	"An Ultracentrifugal Study of Protein-Polysaccharide Interaction"
1955-7	(?)	no award given		
1958	(6)	Dr. Jean Crabbe	Peter Bent Brigham Hospital	"Mechanisms of Aldosterone Secretion"
1959	(3)	Dr. Kenneth McPherson	Boston City Hospital	"Esterase Activity in Leukocytes Demonstrated by the Use of Naphthol AS-D Chloroacetate Substrate"
1960	(4)	Dr. A. H. Samy	Peter Bent Brigham Hospital	"Amino Acid Metabolism and Transport"
1961	(3)	Dr. Joseph F. Greaney	McLean Hospital (Mass. General Hospital)	"Chemical Maturation of Rat Brain with Special Attention to Myelin-Formation"
1962	(5)	Dr. John Ferrante	Carney Hospital	"Manganese-Porphyrin in Red Blood Cells"
1963	(2)	Dr. E. James Potchen	Peter Bent Brigham Hospital	"Studies on Methods of Labelling Parathormone with Radioactive Amino Acids"
1964		Mr. John S. Hood (pre-medical student)	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	"Intestinal Absorption of Calcium in Health and Disease"

TABLE II.

SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE LARKIN AWARD

1. Donovan, A. (with Foley, J. M. and Moloney, W. C.): Precipitation of cerebrospinal fluid globulin by zinc sulfate. *J. Lab. & Clin. Med.* 37:374-381 1951.
2. McPherson, K. (with Moloney, W. C. and Fliegelman, L.): Esterase activity in leukocytes demonstrated by the use of naphthol AS-D chloroacetate substrate. *J. Histochem. & Cytochem.* 8:200-207 1960.
3. Potchen, E. J.: Isotopic labelling of the rat parathyroid as demonstrated by autoradiography. *J. Nuclear Med.* 4:480-484 1963.