

## DICTIONARY OF MEDICAL BIOGRAPHY

Edited by W.F. Bynum and Helen Bynum. 1415 pp.,  
in 5 volumes, illustrated. Westport, CT,  
Greenwood Press, 2007. \$749.95.  
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ALTHOUGH THE STUDY OF MEDICAL HISTORY is no longer focused on the lives of prominent physicians, biography remains integral to the field. The extensive and thoughtfully conceived *Dictionary of Medical Biography* is therefore valuable. Its five volumes offer much to those who are interested professionally or avocationally in the development of the fields of clinical medicine, medical science, and public health.

The book's 1415 pages contain 1140 entries, so reviewing the entire work is not feasible, and such an approach would not reflect how such works are used. I therefore began my assessment by thinking of figures in medical history about whom I might like to know more: microbe hunters I had read of in childhood, doctors who are immortalized through eponyms, and great physicians of the 20th century who are now deceased. The dictionary contains entries on nearly all of them.

Using a computer-generated list of numbers, I then randomly selected 10% of the entries in the dictionary. Reading these 114 entries was a revelation and a pleasure. Especially impressive was the diversity of the profiled and the profilers. The sample included biographies not only of such expected figures as Hippocrates, Galen, Andreas Vesalius, Joseph Lister, Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Alexander Fleming, and Jonas Salk but also of many who are less well known. Examples are Tao Hongjing, one of the most prominent herbalists in Chinese history; Ethel Gordon Fenwick, a British pioneer in nursing; Mori Rintarō (whose pseudonym was Mori Ōgai), a Japanese military physician and novelist; Jerusha Jhirad, a leader in obstetrics and maternal health in India; Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, a physician who was president of Costa Rica; and Emmanuel Odeku, the first Nigerian neurosurgeon. The nearly 400 authors of the dictionary entries are likewise diverse, coming from a variety of institutions, countries, and continents. W.F. Bynum, Helen Bynum, and the 20 fellow "area editors" who were responsible for the coverage of different regions deserve praise for the breadth of the work.

Most of the entries occupy about one printed page, but some run up to five pages. Thus, the work resembles an encyclopedia, rather than a typical dictionary. Black-and-white photographs and illustrations, largely from the collection of the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London, complement many of the entries, and almost every entry ends with a bibliography that lists primary and secondary sources. The dictionary is copyedited well, with clear wording and very few mechanical errors.

Not surprisingly, some entries are more gracefully and engagingly written than others. Especially readable entries include Lawrence Charles Parish's entry on Jonathan Hutchinson, for whom various diseases and signs are named; Kenneth M. Ludmerer's entry on Abraham Flexner, the author of the influential Flexner report on medical education; and Janet McCalman's entry on Australian pediatrician Kate Isobel Campbell. A quote from McCalman's entry on Campbell exemplifies this readability: "She trained generations of doctors in the intricate medicine of the newborn and in tiny babies' 'vocabulary,' hilariously imitating their squeaks, snuffles, and grimaces — all of which told her what the baby was feeling."

The dictionary includes introductory essays on six medical traditions: Western, Islamic, Chinese, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Japanese. Also included are three appendixes: lists of the persons according to country, field of activity, and dates of birth and death. An index of more than 30 pages is also included.

Both a substantial compilation of scholarship and a notable administrative feat, the *Dictionary of Medical Biography* seems likely to find a variety of uses and users. It will aid historians, serve as a resource for students, and provide health professionals and medical scientists with historical knowledge that will deepen their perspective and enhance their teaching and writing. It also offers fine browsing. I look forward to reading many more of the entries.

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Adell Faller's Essay