
The Laureate of the History of Anesthesia program, founded by Dr. Nicholas M. Greene, has as its purpose increased recognition of the richness and importance of the history of the specialty by recognizing the work of scholars who have made singular contributions to the field. The honor is awarded every four years by the WLM Laureate Committee to an individual who has a demonstrable record of contributing over the years outstanding, original materials related to the history of our specialty as reflected by articles published in peer-reviewed journals and/or monographs.

The first Laureate of the History of Anesthesia, in 1996, was Dr. Gwenifer Wilson of Sydney, Australia. In 2000, the WLM Laureate Committee faced a tie so irreconcilable as to necessitate naming both of two equally meritorious candidates as Laureates: Dr. Thomas B. Boulton of Great Britain and Dr. Norman A. Bergman of the United States. Dr. Donald Caton of the United States was named the 2004 Laureate, and Dr. David J. Wilkinson of the United Kingdom was named the 2008 Laureate.

Dr. Bacon began his interest in history early, receiving the 1980 John T. Horton Undergraduate Essay Prize for History prior to receiving a B.A. degree in history (cum laude with departmental honors) and B.S. degree in medicinal chemistry (cum laude) at the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNYAB) in 1981. He received his M.D. degree in 1985 at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and remained on the anesthesiology faculty at SUNYAB and later at the Mayo Clinic, where he personally mentored no fewer than 17 medical students and residents in historical research, resulting in numerous papers and presentations; many of his trainees assumed leadership roles in pursuing the scholarly study of the history of our specialty. Dr. Bacon has received a record number of WLM fellowships (four) and David M. Little Prizes (seven) for his longstanding productivity in the area. In addition, he has earned an M.A. in history while a practicing academic anesthesiologist, with his thesis being: “American Anesthesiology in the 1920s and 30s.”

Early in his career he was the principal organizer for the annual spring meetings of the Anesthesia History Association; he also served on the organizing committees for International History of Anesthesia meetings in 1997, 2001, 2005, and the History Section for the 12th and 15th World Congress of Anaesthesiologists meetings.

His prodigious publications include 71 peer-reviewed articles, with most devoted to the history of anesthesiology. His teaching has been phenomenal; he has garnered teaching awards in his own institution and 21 visiting professorships as well as literally hundreds of presentations on historical topics as far-ranging as organization of anesthesiology, biological warfare and military medicine, and history as instructive of medical professionalism. His organization of history meetings both domestic and international, his contributions both in the U.S. and internationally and six eponymous lectures, including the Blessed Chloroform lecture in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2011, make him most worthy of this distinguished award.

The Laureate was elected by an international panel of judges who are known historians and active contributors to the history of medicine.