

In memoriam

C. Rollins Hanlon, MD, FACS, remembered

by David L. Nahrwold, MD, FACS

C. Rollins Hanlon, MD, FACS—known to almost everyone as “Rollo”—died at his home in Kenilworth, IL, on May 3, 2011, at the age of 96, from lymphoma. Until a few weeks before his death, Dr. Hanlon was still working in his office as Executive Consultant for the American College of Surgeons, a position he held since serving as the College’s Director from 1969 to 1986. He is survived by his wife, Margaret Hammond Hanlon, MD, known as “Peg,” and their eight children: Philip Hanlon, Paul Hanlon, Richard Hanlon, Thomas Hanlon, Christine Hanlon, Mary Welch, Martha Hanlon, and Sarah Cigliano; eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.



Dr. Hanlon

Early years

Dr. Hanlon was born in Baltimore, MD, into a middle-class, Irish-Catholic family. He derived his love of books and literature from his father, and his strong faith from his deeply religious mother, both of whom nurtured the intellects of their seven children.

Rollo, the sixth child, attended Loyola High School and enrolled in Loyola College Baltimore (now Loyola University Maryland), then a small, Jesuit institution of approximately 200 students. Dr. Hanlon majored in Classics, but quickly became enamored of science, and by his sophomore year

knew he wanted to be a doctor. Recognizing his intelligence and drive, the dean allowed him to simply add science courses to his already rigorous Classics curriculum, and arranged laboratory sessions for him during vacation periods and the Christmas holidays. Dr. Hanlon, along with another student, conducted research on the single-cell organism paramecium during the summer of their sophomore year, resulting in Dr. Hanlon’s first scientific publication.

A former Loyola student showed Dr. Hanlon how to sneak into the operating rooms at Johns Hopkins University while he was

in college. Taking advantage of the lax security of the 1930s, Rollo spent Saturdays watching operations, moving from room to room. In particular, Dr. Hanlon was fascinated by the famous neurosurgeon, Walter Dandy, MD. These experiences left a profound impression on him. Later he said about them, “I was part of Hopkins.” Through his passion and devotion for the institution, he remained a “part of Hopkins” for the rest of his life.¹

Dr. Hanlon entered Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1934. After graduation, Dr. Hanlon and his close friend and classmate, William P.

Longmire, Jr., MD, FACS, stayed on as interns, and for another year as fellows in the experimental laboratory, where they studied shock. Dr. Hanlon then left Johns Hopkins for Cincinnati General Hospital, where he completed a Halstedian surgical residency under Mont Reid, MD, FACS. The residency included a fellowship at the University of California, San Francisco, where Dr. Hanlon worked under Howard Naffziger, MD, FACS, in neurological surgery and H. Glenn Bell, MD, FACS, in general surgery. Dr. Hanlon entered the U.S. Navy in 1944, and served in China and on the hospital ship *Repose*. He was discharged in 1946.

Dr. Hanlon's friend, William P. Longmire, known as "Bill" to his friends and colleagues on the Hopkins faculty, convinced the chair of surgery, Alfred Blalock, MD, FACS, to appoint Dr. Hanlon (who was without a job at the time) as director of the experimental laboratory. After a year, Dr. Blalock appointed him resident, the top position in the Hopkins' pyramidal residency system, which was a great honor, and a notable one for Dr. Hanlon, who had already served as resident at Cincinnati General Hospital. Dr. Hanlon served as assistant professor of surgery at Hopkins from 1948 to 1950 and was promoted to associate professor in 1950.

Dr. Blalock had performed the first subclavian to pulmonary artery shunt for tetralogy of Fallot, the Blalock-Taussig operation, in 1944. This innovation created a worldwide sensation and led to the referral of many patients with all types of congenital heart



Dr. and Mrs. Hanlon



Dr. Hanlon (center) with Oliver H. Beahrs, MD, FACS (left), and M. J. Jurkiewicz, MD, FACS, at the 1988 Clinical Congress.

disease to Johns Hopkins. In this invigorating environment, Dr. Hanlon worked in the laboratory on procedures to correct or palliate congenital heart disease. He and Dr. Blalock developed the Blalock-Hanlon operation, a palliative procedure for trans-

position of the great vessels, and performed operations to correct coarctation of the aorta, ductus arteriosus, and of course, they also performed the Blalock-Taussig procedure for tetralogy of Fallot.

Dr. Hanlon and Dr. Ham-

“Dr. Hanlon will certainly be well remembered for his multiple contributions to the American College of Surgeons (ACS). But what I will remember the most is his character and his moral compass. He was always focused on [answering the question] “what would be the right thing to do?” What is in the best interests of the College, its staff, our members, and their patients? That’s how he thought about things. And he was a very thoughtful man, he always thought things through carefully. That trait—his thoughtfulness—gave him a firm foundation, that made him unflappable, and also a good resource on College matters.”

—David B. Hoyt, MD, FACS,
Executive Director, ACS



mond were married in May 1949. Dr. Hammond was a pediatrician in charge of the rheumatic fever clinic at Johns Hopkins and a protégé of Helen Taussig, MD. During the couple’s three-week honeymoon trip in Europe, they were hosted by leading physicians in London, Paris, and Rome. In Rome, Ms. Hanlon was asked to perform a cardiac catheterization on a child, which confirmed the diagnosis of tetralogy of Fallot. Her new husband successfully performed the Blalock-Taussig operation on the young patient.

Saint Louis University

By 1950, Dr. Hanlon’s reputation as a leading cardiothoracic surgeon and innovator had been established. He was recruited at age 35 to be the first full-time professor in a clinical department at Saint Louis University. The research activities in the university’s clinical departments were weak. As chair of surgery, and with a sense of mission born

of his strong Catholic convictions, Dr. Hanlon established this Jesuit institution as a major research and clinical resource for the Midwest, especially in the area of cardiothoracic surgery. His leadership spawned the development of excellence in other departments as well. With an eye toward transplanting the heart, Dr. Hanlon led a faculty research group that studied the effects of denervation of the heart, then thought to be a potential barrier to cardiac transplantation. When the heart-lung machine made open heart surgery feasible, he and his faculty were among the first in the Midwest to correct congenital defects, repair and replace cardiac valves, and perform coronary artery bypass grafts.

Dr. Hanlon demonstrated great respect for his students, who revered him for his integrity, elegant bearing, and commitment to the work of the university. Everyone knew he attended an early mass daily, before mak-

ing rounds and operating. Dr. Hanlon was also greatly respected by his peers for the clarity of his thinking and his academic accomplishments. His speeches and discourses with others were learned and erudite; he often referred to the classics and history in his presentations, sending his audiences scurrying for dictionaries and reference books.

While in St. Louis, MO, Dr. Hanlon was elected president of the Society of University Surgeons, the Society for Vascular Surgery, and the Society of Clinical Surgery. He was a founding member of the American Board of Thoracic Surgery and a member and chairman of the American Board of Surgery.

The College

In 1967, Dr. Hanlon was elected a Governor of the American College of Surgeons, and two years later, he was elected as a Regent. In 1969, at the pinnacle of his academic career, the Board

"This is a sad day for American and international surgery. Let it be said that Dr. Hanlon was the face of American surgery. We have lost a great man and a true leader."

—L. D. Britt, MD, MPH,
FACS, FCCM, FRCS(Eng)(Hon),
FRCS(Ed)(Hon), FWACS(Hon)
*ACS President,
and Brickhouse Professor
and chair, department of surgery,
Eastern Virginia Medical School,
Norfolk, VA*



of Regents appointed Dr. Hanlon as Director of the College, and he reluctantly left Saint Louis University, research, and clinical medicine. Dr. Hanlon's dream of transplanting the heart was realized by his protégé, successor, and dear friend, Vallee L. Willman, MD, FACS.

Dr. Hanlon's first project at the College was to review all the formal statements on surgical practice and ethics that had been made by the Board of Regents since the College's founding in 1913. He consolidated and extended these statements into the *Statements on Principles*, which served as the ethical and moral basis for his administration of the College, as well as the College's principles for the competent, ethical practice of surgery. This publication prescribed the duties of surgeons for preoperative, operative, and postoperative care; prohibited fee splitting and itinerant surgery; and advocated moral and ethical

fitness, scientific honesty, and placing the welfare of the patient above all else. The *Statements on Principles* were published in 1974, and were most recently revised in 2008; they are now available online (http://www.facs.org/fellows_info/statements/stonprin.html). Throughout his association with the College, Dr. Hanlon believed strongly that its purpose was to promote the ethical and competent practice of surgery. As the Director, he embodied this ideology.

When Dr. Hanlon arrived at the College, it had lost its voice and influence in the area of graduate medical education. To regain it, he became very active in the Council of Medical Specialty Societies (CMSS), of which the College is a member. The CMSS was one of the sponsors of the Liaison Committee on Graduate Medical Education (LCGME), which was struggling to standardize graduate medical education. Dr. Hanlon's leadership, which included the

presidency of the CMSS, firmly established the LCGME and its successor, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), as the national regulators of graduate medical education. The formation of the ACGME has led to the continuous elevation of the standards and quality of graduate surgical education.

Early on, Dr. Hanlon clarified the role of the Governors as the liaison between the Fellows and the Board of Regents. The Governors responded by generating annual reports for the Regents, which detail and prioritize the concerns of the Fellows. These reports set the agenda for the Regents and College staff, linking their activities directly to the problems surgeons experience in caring for their patients, and creating opportunities to elevate the standards of surgical practice.

During Dr. Hanlon's directorship, the number of scholarships for young surgeons was expanded, an international department was established to promote membership from Latin American countries, the humane care of research animals was advocated and supported financially, and the advisory councils were reorganized to recruit and engage surgical specialists in the College and its activities.

Dr. Hanlon's friend Bill Longmire served as a Regent, Chair of the Board of Regents, and President of the College during Dr. Hanlon's directorship. Although Rollo credited Bill with establishing the Committee on Young Surgeons, it is clear that they worked together to increase the influence of young surgeons

“There is no other person who has worked more years, with more passion and enthusiasm for the ACS, than Dr. Hanlon. Maturity, balance, and equanimity defined his leadership and served as an inspiration to all. Although he is no longer with us physically, he will continue to live in the hearts and minds of all those who he touched directly, and through his remarkable legacy to the College.”

—Carlos A. Pellegrini, MD,
FACS, FRCSI(Hon),
*Chair, ACS Board of Regents,
and The Henry N. Harkins Professor
and Chair, department of surgery,
University of Washington, Seattle*



in College affairs. Both physicians also revised the structure of College committees, setting term limits and specifying how chairs and vice-chairs are selected. This revised structure facilitated the influx of new ideas into College committees and gave more Fellows a voice in College affairs.

When Dr. Hanlon was appointed Director, the American Medical Association (AMA) spoke for the profession on legislative matters, and the AMA gradually diminished the College's influence within its House of Delegates. In response, Dr. Hanlon pulled the College's Delegates out of the AMA, shocking the association's leaders and the College fellowship. He decided that only the College could represent the interests of its members in legislative matters. To do so, Dr. Hanlon established the College's Washington, DC,

Office, one of the most important events in the history of this organization.²

Dr. Hanlon, the Regents, and the College staff improved continuing education in surgery by establishing the popular *Surgical Education and Self-Assessment Program*.[™] The spring meeting, now defunct, was initiated and eventually morphed into an energizing general surgery gathering when that specialty was suffering a crisis of identity and disproportionately inadequate reimbursement. Dr. Hanlon and Edwin Gerrish, MD, FACS, who he recruited as director of the Assembly Department, also initiated international meetings with the Royal Colleges and surgical organizations in France and Germany, providing Fellows and their spouses with opportunities for international travel, fellowship, and learning.

Retirement

Upon his retirement as Director, Dr. Hanlon was honored by the College by election to its presidency. He was also president of the prestigious American Surgical Association. Dr. Hanlon received many other honors and awards, including an honorary degree from Georgetown University, Washington, DC. In 2010, the American College of Surgeons presented Dr. Hanlon with its first Lifetime Achievement Award at the Clinical Congress in Washington, DC.

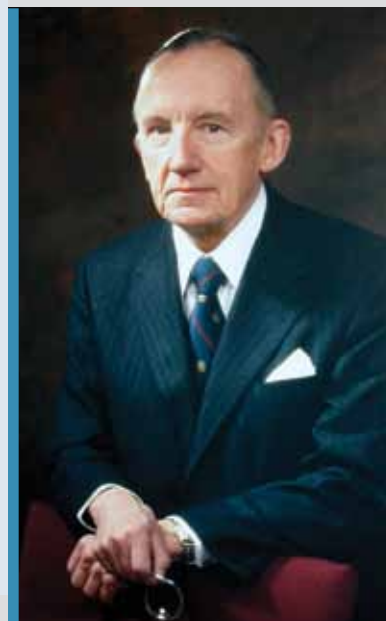
Dr. Hanlon generated respect and admiration throughout his service as Director. In an environment populated by America's elite medical leaders, Rollo was a better thinker, a harder worker, better prepared, and more principled than most. He met the challenges of his tenure with an excellent nose for the most

“During my 10-year tenure as Executive Director of the ACS, Rollo remained a steadfast supporter and mentor to me. With a broad historical perspective coupled with a fervent desire that the College meet its professional obligations, I often sought his advice on so many diverse issues. His thoughts were eloquently expressed and always based on the mission and values of ACS, which he espoused throughout his career.

I have many stories about Rollo that epitomize his devotion to the College. None stands out more than when a key lecturer at the Clinical Congress in San Francisco cancelled at the very last moment. With two days notice, he delivered an outstanding presentation to a large audience with clarity and succinctness on a topic of humanism.

Fortunately, before his death, I expressed to him my respect and appreciation for the many hours we spent together and his wise counsel. Rollo and his wonderful wife Peg have done so much for the ACS. We will miss him greatly.”

—Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS,
former Executive Director, ACS; Chair, ACS Foundation



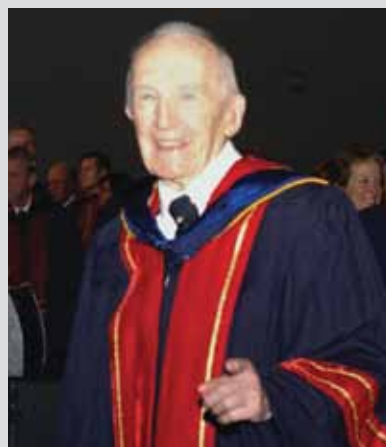
efficacious strategic directions, and he restored the College to preeminence.

After his retirement as Director, Dr. Hanlon stayed on at the College as the organization's uncompensated Executive Consultant for 25 years. In this role, Dr. Hanlon attended important meetings of College staff, committees, and of course, the Board of Regents. His wise counsel was invaluable to his four successors and to the College staff. He loved the College and regarded the staff—many of whom came to him with their personal problems—as his friends. As professor and emeritus professor of surgery at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, Dr. Hanlon taught ethics to medical students, wrote commentary and remembrances, and was a frequent speaker at conferences on ethics, medical history, and socioeconomic issues.

Dr. Hanlon's "Director's memos," published in each issue of the *Bulletin of the American College of Surgeons* from 1970 to 1986, were collected in a volume by the Regents as a tribute to him upon his retirement.³ These memos are an erudite history of surgery and of the health care environment during Dr. Hanlon's almost two decades as Director, and a reminder of the intellectual depth and breadth of this principled surgeon whose lasting influence on the College will equal that of its founder, Franklin H. Martin, MD, FACS.

References

1. Private papers of C. Rollins Hanlon, MD, FACS. Kindly supplied by Margaret H. Hanlon, MD.
2. American College of Surgeons. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Regents, June 13-15, 1980. Box 53. American College of Surgeons Archives, Chicago, IL.



Dr. Hanlon at the 2010 Convocation.

3. Hanlon CR. *The American College of Surgeons. 1970-1986. Director's Memos.* Chicago, IL: American College of Surgeons, 1986.

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