

Jack Michenfelder and the Achievement of Professional Respect

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In my thirty years at Mayo, I have been honored to work with some truly brilliant anesthesiologists. John D. Michenfelder and Richard A. Theye were the smartest (of the men) in my opinion. These two contemporaries built careers in research. Dick Theye became chair of the department but his career was cut short while Jack Michenfelder is alive and well in his retirement, living on the shore of Lake Shady in Oronoco.

Dick had come out of Indiana ahead of Jack's emergence from St. Louis. Both had been through the Navy; Jack had loved internal

medicine until a stint in a Navy outpatient clinic led to his choice of anesthesia. The two friends developed research programs which complimented each other, although Jack humbly attributes his development in research (as well as bird hunting) to Dick Theye. Five years after going on staff, Jack had his first NIH grant, and Dick Theye became Chair of the Section of Anesthesia Research the same year (1966). Dick Theye went on to become department chair in 1971, at age 48, also serving as a Director of the ABA until his career and his life ended tragically in 1977 due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.



Dick Theye fly fishing out west in the early '70s. Photo obtained from the Wood Library-Museum to whom it had been donated by Dr. Roy Cucchiara.



Jack Michenfelder at an annual department picnic, hosted at his home, circa 1977. Photo by Dr. Peter Wilson, then a pain fellow.

The Man

In addition to Jack Michenfelder's brilliance, his devotion to the truth and absolute intolerance of anything dishonest were obvious to those working with him. Although polite to his anesthesia colleagues and always receptive to new ideas and opinions, he gave you the feeling he would be a formidable adversary in disagreement. I thought of his personality as a cross between Perry Mason and Clint Eastwood. "Seek respect, not love" is one of his mottos. "Neuroanesthesia and the Achievement of Professional Respect" was the title of his Rovenstine Lecture for the ASA.¹ When discussing an upcoming legal deposition, he once told me why he never feared a court room interrogation, "Think of it as spending a couple of hours matching wits with a malpractice lawyer."

We seldom appreciate the value of the late surgical start on Wednesdays in facilitating our department's educational environment. The Wednesday AM conference is taken for granted, especially by those who do not attend. Before 1976, there was no opportunity for staff and residents from both Rochester hospitals to meet on a regular basis. Surgical starts were disorganized with different surgical specialties showing up late each morning because it was "their" conference day. Theye and Michenfelder came up with the concept of using one day for educational conferences for all specialties and a late surgical start for that day. In 1976 this was a radical change at Mayo, and Theye and Michenfelder fought it through the Mayo committee system. In spite of their research priorities, the commitment of both professors to education could never be questioned, and Jack Michenfelder attended the Wednesday morning conference regularly until his retirement, taking apart a Styrofoam cup, if not an occasional hapless speaker, each week.

PowerPoint was not the only difference between anesthesia conferences in the 1970s and those of today. The stress level was also different back then. As a presenter, you never knew when Michenfelder or Theye or both would honor you by showing up at your morning conference. One well-phrased question and you realized immediately that you did not know your subject quite as well as you thought you did. Try clinging to your ignorance, and get ready to be brutalized in a style that no longer happens in our educational system.

Jack never turned his back on his roots in clinical anesthesia, and he always felt strongly about sharing the clinical burden. Even his research kept its clinical connection; one analysis attributed over 25 percent of his original publications to clinical science as opposed to laboratory research.² Although his clinical FTE allocation was only 20 percent within the final 14 years of his career, he continued to take one clinical "late" assignment in neuro per week. His motivation was to prevent any of his colleagues in the small neuroanesthesia group from having to take two lates in the same week with any regularity.

Academic Accomplishments

Jack's curriculum vitae listed over 140 peer-reviewed original articles, 34 references in the "Chapters and Proceedings" section, 12 editorials in the journal *Anesthesiology*, and three books. One 1974 publication was chosen as one of the "Classic Papers Revisited" in *Anesthesiology*.³ To avoid the oversimplification of counting publications, let me try to explain the significance of some of his accomplishments:

There are three major awards in our field celebrated each year at the October meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists: (1) The Rovenstine Lecture has been the keynote address since 1962, (2) The ASA

Excellence in Research Award, and (3) The ASA Distinguished Service Award (dating back to 1945) are self explanatory in their titles. Jack was only the second anesthesiologist ever to be awarded all three honors (1988, 1990, and 1991, respectively) and the only "Triple Crown" winner to also serve as editor-in-chief of *Anesthesiology*, the Journal of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

Dr. Michenfelder's research is summarized in John Tinker's biography.² After developing an eloquent model that became the standard method of measuring cerebral blood flow in animals, Jack studied anesthetic effects. He then went on to a series of studies about pharmacologic protection against cerebral ischemia. John Tinker wrote that Jack had "the finest ability to cut to the essence of a scientific problem of anyone I have ever met. He is uninterested in and unimpressed by jargon and despises deliberate complexity."

He served on the editorial board of *Anesthesiology* for six years before his leadership as editor-in-chief (1979-1985). Additionally, he served on the editorial boards of seven other (non-anesthesia) journals, attributing to the importance of his work across all the neurosciences.

NIH grants supported his research on cerebral metabolism and blood flow and the cerebral effects of anesthesia-related interventions for 26 years. My anesthesiologist father once related to me an unforgettable case from his private practice in the '60s; the patient suffered uncontrolled herniation of the brain out of a craniotomy incision. I believe Dr. Michenfelder's research did more than that of any other person to elucidate the principles of neuroanesthesia, leading to safety for our patients and an element of control for neuroanesthesiologists that my father could not have dreamed of. Research trainees in Jack's lab went on to become prominent academicians in Norway, Japan, South America, and other parts of the world.

His 1988 215-page single-authored text *Anesthesia and the Brain* is a classic monograph not only for its timeless discussion of the subject but also as an example of clarity of writing style. Every time I refer to it, I am struck with the conciseness of his prose. The book was awarded the Anesthesia Foundation Book Award in 1990. He also co-edited with Roy Cucchiara and Susan Black two editions of the text *Clinical Neuroanesthesia*.

He has been called the "Father of Neuroanesthesia" and did coin the term "neuroanesthesia" when he used it as the title of his classic review article.⁴ Leroy Vandam supported his use of the term over objections of a reviewer. He was elected the first President of the Society of Neurosurgical Anesthesia and Neurologic Supportive Care.

He was elected Fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland in 1982 and Fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1988. This would make his proper professional signature (if he cared to use it all) John D. Michenfelder, M.D., F.F.A.R.C.S.I., F.F.A.R.C.S.E.

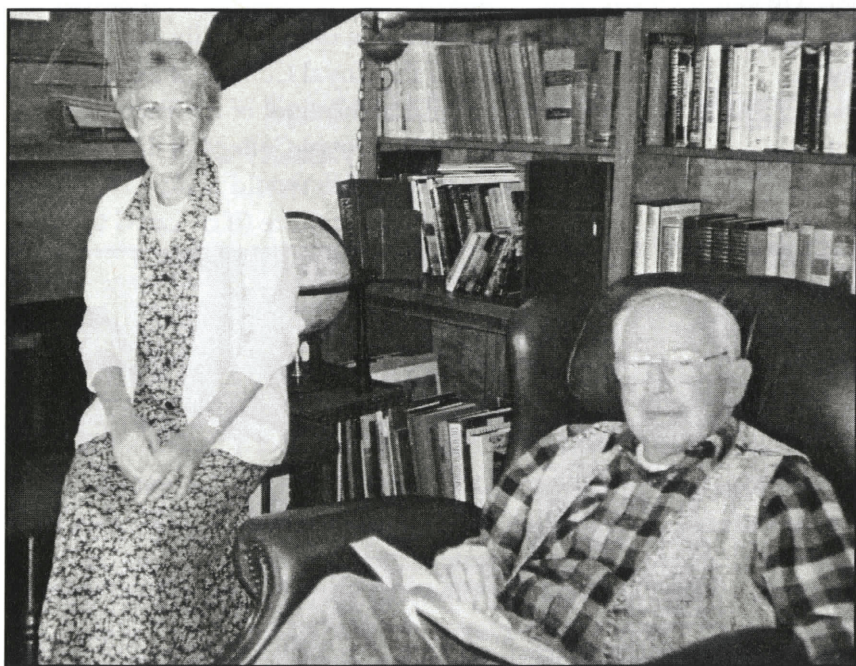
The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences was chartered in 1970 to honor scientists and construct a framework in which they might offer unbiased, science-based advice on matters of biomedical science, medicine, and health. Jack Michenfelder was the third Mayo physician who served and the fifth anesthesiologist ever to be elected to this body.

Living Well on Lake Shady

Many Mayo physicians continue in medicine in some capacity after retirement but not Jack. In 1993 his slides went into the trash, and the files in his office went into the recycling bin. He has gracefully chosen to get a life instead of hanging on to his career.



The historic Michenfelder home on Lake Shady



Monica and Jack Michenfelder

Jack and his wife, Monica, enjoy life in an idyllic rural setting north of Rochester on the shore of Lake Shady. Horses and grandchildren frequently run in the pasture between the house and the lake. Their home with its pool, tennis court, and infamous horseshoe pits has often been the location for annual department picnics and other social functions.

Balancing care of our patients, academic pursuits, and personal life is a continuing challenge for professionals. During his career, Jack Michenfelder showed us how to take academic life to its highest level on a world-wide stage and how to make contributions that improve patient care. In retirement, he has shown us how to quit at the top of one's game and that academic and professional success need not exclude developing a personal life to sustain us during and after Mayo.

References:

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