

ORATOR: Dr. Michael P. Hirsh

**ORATION: Profiles in Medical Courage:
A Message of Hope, Survival, and Transcendence**

Dr. Hirsh begins by outlining definitions of courage that he has found in the writings of such notables as Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Wayne. He follows this by presenting vignettes of five physicians that exemplify medical courage and that should serve as examples and inspiration for all physicians. Each vignette is accompanied by comments that relate them to our District Society and to some of the problems faced by contemporary medicine.

These profiles are:

Dr. Walter Reed, the army physician who conquered Yellow Fever during the Spanish-American war, worked under deplorable conditions in poor hospital facilities and with only the limited tools of his time. Yet he identified the mosquito as the vector of the disease which led to its control and enabled the building of the Panama Canal.

Dr. William E. Ladd, a Harvard surgeon, now recognized as the father of pediatric surgery was sent to Halifax, Nova Scotia to offer surgical assistance in the aftermath of the munitions ship explosion of 1917 which killed and wounded thousands. His experience operating on the many injured children led him, upon returning to Boston, to dedicate his career to pediatric surgery despite resistance to the field by fellow surgeons. His training of pediatric surgeons over the next decades led eventually, in 1971, to the formation of the Board of Pediatric Surgery.

Dr. Jonas Salk through unwavering dedication and effort, developed the first successful polio vaccine. Despite his success with the polio vaccine he was frustrated in later efforts to develop an HIV-AIDS. But this also demonstrated the courage of enduring failure.

Dr. C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General under Reagan and Bush from 1982-1989, espoused policies dealing with abortion, AIDS, the rights of the disabled, and public health that often conflicted with those of the presidents he served under and were often attacked by both the political right and left.

Dr. Barbara Barlow, the longstanding Chief of Pediatric Surgery at Harlem Hospital in the Columbia University Medical System in New York City struggled through the glass ceilings that limited women in surgery and fought against the unfavorable socio-economic milieu around her hospital to pressure slumlords and the city to actions that would improve the safety of children.

The common themes among these individuals, Dr. Hirsh believes, are vision, passion, the courage to face failure yet persevere, and the determination to do the right thing. Such courage would help us face current issues affecting our membership. Dr. Hirsh outlines these as including universal health coverage, tiering, liability concerns, and preventive health care.