

'The costs of creativity'

Mouraviev and Gleave have written a history of urologists who have won Nobel Prizes, and it is a compelling read. In particular, the tribulations suffered by Werner Forsmann, a German urologist who conceived of the concept of cardiac catheterization, and performed the first such procedure (on himself), are fascinating and instructive. Forsmann was clearly ahead of his time. He was innovative and creative, in several disparate areas of medicine. His reward was to be mocked and ostracized by his superiors in the German medical hierarchy. His discoveries were belittled as circus tricks. (Some circus, and some tricks). A patriotic German, he joined the Nazi party during WWII. In this, he accompanied the sullied ranks of several other creative German intellectuals who were Nazi supporters, including the philosopher Martin Heidegger. This tainted his reputation in the post war period. Nonetheless, the discovery of cardiac catheterization was thought to be of such importance that his Nazi past was disregarded in the decision to award him the Nobel.

Some of the lessons of this story are clear. Innovators are often not appreciated by their peers, particularly when a paradigm shift is involved (i.e., from open surgery to percutaneous access). The value of an extraordinary advance may not be apparent at the time of the discovery. Being gifted with scientific insight and profound intellectual creativity does not preclude utter moral blindness.



The journal is delighted to publish Dr. W. Orovan's essay on the Romanow commission. Dr. Orovan, former President of the Ontario Medical Association is one of the most senior and experienced physicians on the Canadian medical scene. His views are reasoned and insightful. We welcome other contributions from our readers on the subject of the future of Canadian Health Care.

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