

Friend of the Academy, Advocate for Perfusionists



Cardiac surgeon, Dr. W. Gerald Rainer, from Denver, Colorado, and Honorary Member of the American Academy of Cardiovascular Perfusion, died this past November, one day after his 90th birthday. On many occasions over two decades he attended Academy meetings as an invited panelist, guest, or speaker, the last of which was in 2003 when we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the first successful open-heart case using cardiopulmonary bypass. Many luminaries in the field attended that meeting, and Dr. Rainer gave a superb overview of the development of cardiac surgery prior to the use of cardiopulmonary bypass.¹ Typically, he was gracious to acknowledge the “courageous pioneers”, many of whom he had worked with during his distinguished career.

Less well known was Dr. Rainer’s behind the scenes efforts in the early 1980s to bring surgeons and perfusionists together during some fractious times. The primary objection from the surgeons’ perspective concerned the 1981 deadline set by the American Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion, which mandated

only graduates of accredited educational programs would be eligible to sit for the certification examination. With consummate skill and diplomacy, Dr. Rainer proposed the creation of the Coordinating Committee for Perfusion Affairs (CCPA) to bring the vested and often passionate parties together. Hostile statements^{2, 3} and editorials⁴ were published in the thoracic surgery journals regarding the 1981 deadline, which evolved within a few short years to one praising the perfusion profession.⁵ The CCPA was short-lived but there is little doubt it significantly prevented the backward movement to the days of on-the-job training of perfusionists. For that alone, we owe Dr. Rainer our profound thanks.

He was always a gentleman, and his presidential address⁶ to the Society of Thoracic Surgeons bears re-reading for his emphasis on leadership traits and characteristics. He wrote of those qualities he thought important and which he believed had been manifested by past leaders of their society. Unwritten was the clear impression that Dr. Rainer embodied all aspects of those essential traits he espoused.

We mourn his passing and look to him for the extraordinary example he set.

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References

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