


# the HOPKINS FOUR

OSLER, HALSTED, WELCH, and KELLY



An exhibit at the

  
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE

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# THE HOPKINS FOUR

William Osler, William S. Halsted, William H. Welch, and Howard A. Kelly are four of America's most revered physicians. Their contributions to the fields of internal medicine, surgery, pathology, and gynecology, as well as medical education in general, have been recognized to be of great importance. Much has been written extolling their virtues and contributions.

One purpose of this exhibit is to examine these four medical figures as mortal beings. An effort has been made to select material which portrays their foibles, not to ridicule or belittle them, but to demonstrate their very human qualities. It is our purpose to clarify rather than blemish the images of Osler, Halsted, Welch, and Kelly. With this in mind, the following are some footnotes on The Hopkins Four.

William S. Halsted was addicted to morphine throughout his professional career as Professor of Surgery at Johns Hopkins.

William Osler was an inveterate prankster whose practical jokes included the publication of off-color fictitious case reports under a pseudonym.

Howard A. Kelly was considered a religious fanatic by some of his medical colleagues and "a public nuisance" by H. L. Mencken.

William H. Welch, while preaching a strictly hygienic life for others, violated all of his own precepts in matters of eating, drinking, and smoking — and lived to the age of 84.

Dr. Kelly was a competent and highly respected naturalist with particular contributions in botany and herpetology.

The name "The Halstedians" was proposed for an organization of physician narcotic addicts in 1957.

For a short while after Osler presented his address, "The Fixed Period," in 1905, the term "oslerize" was coined to signify euthanasia.

"The Hopkins Four" were incorporated in a popular novel entitled *Miss Susie Slagle's* by Augusta Tucker in 1939.

Dr. Halsted was a nephew (by marriage) of General Wade Hampton of Civil War fame.

Dr. Welch on several occasions listed the Army Medical Library (now National Library of Medicine) and its Index-Catalogue as this country's most important contribution to medical knowledge.

Dr. Halsted was such a perfectionist that he refused the service of Baltimore establishments and sent his fine linen shirts to Paris to be laundered.



Halsted and Kelly had the reputation of charging such high fees to their private patients that their internist friends, the Hopkins Board of Trustees, and the local practitioners were aghast.

Dr. Welch often read sections of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to develop "instant" erudition on the most obscure subjects prior to a dinner party.

Dr. Osler's therapeutic conservatism as expressed in *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* was severely criticized by a number of American physicians (Paranoia antitherapeuticum Baltimorensis).

Dr. Halsted's introduction of rubber gloves into surgery was not to protect the patient from infection but to protect the skin of his scrub nurse and future wife.

Dr. Welch's 80th birthday was the occasion of a worldwide celebration including an address by the President of the United States.

Dr. Osler was the originator of the graded residency training program as we know it today.

Dr. Kelly was co-author with Walter Burrage of the valuable reference work *Dictionary of American Medical Biography*.

Dr. Welch's productive years in the laboratory ended around 1900 after which he became the apostle of scientific medicine in the United States and spokesman for the Hopkins plan in medical education.

Dr. Kelly's early interest and support in the artist, Max Broedel, set the stage for a revolutionary change in medical illustration.

Dr. Osler was a vigorous opponent of the institution of full-time clinical professorships at the Johns Hopkins in 1914 because of his concern that it would lead to a group of teachers "cabined, cribbed, confined within the four walls of a hospital, practicing the fugitive and cloistered virtues of a clinical monk – a caste of clinical Brahmins" out of touch with the realities of the daily practice of medicine.

Dr. Halsted, while generally considered the epitome of the straight full-time physician with little interest in private practice, was at one time an enthusiastic supporter of private practice for medical school faculty (geographic full-time) and had a modest size but lucrative private practice in Baltimore prior to 1914 and the institution of straight full-time for the clinical professorships at Hopkins.

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Cover:

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) painted the four physicians in 1905. The painting was commissioned by Miss Mary Garrett and was presented to the Johns Hopkins University in 1906. It now hangs in the Welch Medical Library.

The Library extends thanks to the following organizations for their contributions:

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