Paul C. Bucy, M.D., 1904–1992

IVAN CIRIC, M.D.

The Evanston Hospital, Evanston, Illinois

Paul Clancy Bucy, neurosurgeon, teacher, scientist, author, and the last surviving founding member of the Harvey Cushing Society, died at the age of 87 years at his home in Tyron, North Carolina, on September 22, 1992.

Among his former residents, Dr. Bucy will always be remembered as a master surgeon and great leader. Endowed with a razor-sharp intellect and an uncanny ability to sort out priorities, he could analyze a perioperative problem precisely and without hesitation, with the solution always expressed in a clear, eloquent, and convincing manner. He was known to be able to complete a subtemporal retrogasserian rhizotomy in 18 minutes flat. As one of the first neurosurgeons to advocate and carry out successfully the radical removal of malignant cerebral gliomas, Dr. Bucy has left a legacy that remains alive to this day. It is not surprising that Dr. Bucy enjoyed the undivided respect and the unwavering loyalty of his residents. To put it simply, the “Chief” could do no wrong. While his presence was authoritative without being imposing, Dr. Bucy’s towering personality did not stifle creativity. When asked once if there was a common thread among his former residents, he retorted: “they all excelled in areas I did not teach them.”

A pioneer of organized neurosurgery, Dr. Bucy rose swiftly to become one of the most respected leaders of American and international neurosurgery. He received numerous honors at home and abroad. To name but a few, Dr. Bucy was president of the Harvey Cushing Society, of the Society of Neurological Surgeons, and of the World Federation of Neurological Surgeons. He was the honored guest of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons and the recipient of the Cushing Medal. Dr. Bucy served on the Board and was chairman of the American Board of Neurological Surgery, he was a member and chairman of the Editorial Board (and one-time business manager) of the Journal of Neurosurgery, publisher and editor of Surgical Neurology, and a frequent congressional witness especially as a proponent of spinal cord injury centers. Under his leadership, such a center was established at Wesley Memorial Hospital (today Northwestern Memorial Hospital) and the Northwestern University. Yet, in spite of all these lofty achievements, Dr. Bucy never forgot his roots. As a true midwesterner, he was a warm and compassionate man who always found time for a chat with a student nurse, to hear grievances by the nursing staff, or to inquire about an intern’s ill relative. Above all, Dr. Bucy never lost sight of his primary obligation to his patients and their families. “One does not treat x-rays or even brain tumors, one treats people,” I heard him remark frequently.

Born in rural Hubbard, Iowa, in 1904, Dr. Bucy grew up with family values such as decency, respect for the absolute truth, and hard work. He demanded no less of his associates and subordinates. An excellent student, Dr. Bucy was accepted to Harvard College, but could
not attend for financial reasons. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Iowa State College and the M.D. degree from The University of Iowa. After an internship at the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Dr. Bucy joined Dr. Percival Bailey at the University of Chicago as a young assistant neurosurgeon. Soon after his arrival Dr. Bailey became ill, leaving the day-to-day running of the department to his young assistant. Within a month, Dr. Bucy had operated successfully on a patient with a brain tumor. With Dr. Bailey's urging and the University's consent and support, Dr. Bucy went abroad to study under Norman Dott in Edinburgh, Gordon Holmes in London, and Otfred Foester in Breslau, Germany. Dr. Bucy also spent time in Dr. John Fulton's laboratory at Yale University. One can only speculate as to the influence these remarkable men had on Dr. Bucy's future career as a neurosurgeon and scientist. After returning to the University of Chicago, he enjoyed a productive, scientific relationship with Dr. Heinrich Kluver with whom he published a series of papers on temporal lobe functions in primates. The Kluver-Bucy syndrome is but one of many scientific discoveries they made.

Dr. Bucy's subsequent scientific endeavors were focused on the function of the pyramidal and the extrapyramidal systems, which he pursued throughout his career as he moved from the University of Chicago to the University of Illinois and later to the Northwestern University Medical School. At Wesley Memorial Hospital, Dr. Bucy established a large research laboratory. The experiments, mostly on primates, were conducted by his associates and residents. Dr. Bucy's scientific observations on the pyramidal and extrapyramidal systems were especially important in the days of burgeoning surgery for Parkinson's disease, which he helped to steer in the proper direction. Dr. Bucy authored over 380 papers, monographs, and textbooks. The monograph on pediatric brain tumors with Drs. Percival Bailey and Douglas Buchanan and the neurology textbook with Drs. Roy Grinker and Adolph Sahs remain classics to this day.

Dr. Bucy's extracurricular interests were rather broad. He was an insatiable reader and a prolific writer. Dr. Bucy belonged to and eventually became president of the Chicago Literary Club. He traveled worldwide and described his travels in the book *Beyond All Dreams* with his charming wife Evelyn as coauthor. With his vast intellectual interests, erudition, and sonorous voice, Dr. Bucy was a spellbinding storyteller, who would more often than not assume the leading role in any discussion. Dr. and Mrs. Bucy were gracious hosts not only to his peers and visiting dignitaries but also to his residents who were frequently invited to their home. The moments Ann and I were fortunate to spend with Dr. and Mrs. Bucy in their home will be cherished by us for the rest of our lives.

After his retirement from the practice of neurosurgery, Dr. Bucy took on a new challenge when he established the journal *Surgical Neurology*. His published editorial comments remain a testimony to his keen power of observation and his ability to focus on an issue, analyze it logically, and formulate opinions, most of which have withstood the test of time.

As he grew older and physically less robust, making it more difficult for him to leave his beautiful home in Tryon, North Carolina, Dr. Bucy's interests in current events, especially as they affect medicine in general and neurosurgery in particular, did not wane. He shared his views and opinions in this regard with his former associates and residents on numerous occasions. Miss Rose Lotz, Dr. Bucy's capable secretary for many years and a great friend to his residents, followed him into retirement and remained at his side as his trusted assistant until the very end. Dr. Bucy is survived by his wife, two sons (Craig, a businessman, and James, a urologist), and 10 grandchildren.

Men and women of great intellect, profound wisdom, utter honesty and integrity, and strong leadership are rare. American neurosurgery was fortunate to have had such a man in its midst.

References


Address reprint requests to: Ivan Ciric, M.D., The Evanston Hospital, 2650 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201.