



Motion regarding the eponyms of Sir William Osler—*Motion relative aux éponymes de Sir William Osler*

Submitted to the General Assembly, December 2nd, 2019

WHEREAS, we are taught throughout our curriculum that Sir William Osler, a McGill medicine alumnus, contributed greatly to the field of medical education, notably pioneering the practice of bedside teaching, and that he was a great man who should be remembered;

WHEREAS, there are many things in and around medical school at McGill that bear his name which remind us of the significance and accomplishments of this physician¹;

WHEREAS, we are not taught, in contrast, that he held white supremacist and sexist views;

WHEREAS, one example of Sir William Osler's prejudices are provided by a speech

CONSIDÉRANT QU'on nous enseigne tout au long de notre curriculum que Sir William Osler, diplômé de la Faculté de médecine de McGill, a contribué de façon remarquable à l'éducation médicale, notamment en instituant l'enseignement au chevet, et qu'il est un grand homme dont il faut se remémorer,

CONSIDÉRANT QUE son nom est utilisé de plusieurs façons dans l'environnement de la Faculté de médecine de McGill, de façon à nous rappeler l'importance et les accomplissements de ce médecin¹,

CONSIDÉRANT QU'en contrepartie, il ne nous est pas enseigné qu'il avait des convictions sexistes et suprématistes blanches,

CONSIDÉRANT QU'un exemple de ses préjugés est évident dans un discours qu'il a donné au Canada Club à Londres, en

¹ An annual Osler banquet at the Faculty accompanied by an annual Osler lecture; a monument and a library dedicated to him at McIntyre Medical Building; an amphitheatre at the Montreal General Hospital (McGill University Health Centre); the *Promenade Sir-William-Osler* adjacent to the McIntyre building; a course component of medical physicianship, called the "Osler Group", that is led by "Osler Fellows"; and even an Osler essay competition where medals depicting Osler's face are handed out to winners.
Un banquet Osler annuel à la Faculté accompagné d'une conférence Osler; un monument et une bibliothèque à son nom au Pavillon des sciences médicales McIntyre; un amphithéâtre à l'Hôpital général de Montréal (CUSM); la Promenade Sir-William-Osler adjacente au Pavillon McIntyre; une composante du curriculum médical à McGill, intitulé « Groupe Osler », mené par un « Moniteur Osler »; et même un concours d'essais Osler où une médaille dépeignant Osler est remis au gagnant.



he gave to the Canada Club in London, England, on the occasion of the arrival of the Komagata Maru ship on the Canadian West Coast, housing hundreds of people from the Indian subcontinent who were denied entry because they were not European, meaning not white, despite their British allegiance which should have granted entry to the country²:

Angleterre, à l'occasion de l'arrivée du navire Komagata Maru sur la côte ouest canadienne, avec à bord des centaines de personnes du sous-continent indien qui s'étaient vues refuser l'entrée au Canada car non-européennes, c'est-à-dire non-blanches, malgré leur allégeance britannique qui aurait dû leur permettre l'accès au pays²:

*"Speaking of the problems which lay before Canada, Sir William said in the first place we have made the country a white man's country. Other [i.e., Asian] countries were beginning to swarm over with population. "The question with us is what are we to do when the yellow and brown men begin to swarm over We can say we do not want [Chinese and Japanese] people, but the case is different with the [East] Indians, who are our fellow citizens [of the British Empire]. We ought, if we could, say to them: 'Come in, you are welcome.' But we have to safeguard our country. Therefore we shall be bound to say, 'We are sorry, we would if we could, but you cannot come in on equal terms with Europeans.' We are bound to make our country a white man's country."*³

WHEREAS, there is also evidence to support that Osler was opposed to having women in medicine:

CONSIDÉRANT QU'il y également des preuves documentaires suggérant qu'Osler s'opposait à la présence des femmes en médecine:

"On her first day in Baltimore in the fall of 1896, Reed took a carriage ride to the campus to wander about the place that she had looked forward to for so long. Beside her sat a distinguished-looking gentleman who proceeded to crudely and arrogantly study her physique from head to toe. When she climbed down from the carriage in front of the Medical School, he asked her if she was entering the school. To her affirmative reply, he blurted out, "Don't. Go home." He then walked away into the administrative building without another word. This man, Reed later discovered, was none other than William Osler—quite an

² *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: the Sikh challenge to Canada's colour bar* (1989). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press. pp. 81, 83.

³ *The Gazette* (1914). *Determined to do utmost for Canada*. 142(128):1.



*inauspicious beginning to a 5-year tenure (including her internship) that was to be mentally as well as emotionally taxing.*⁴

WHEREAS, examples of renaming abound in medicine^{5,6};

WHEREAS, there are countless lesser known figures from McGill's past whose accomplishments are worthy of being known and celebrated, for example Norman Bethune, a thoracic surgeon who worked at the Royal Victoria Hospital and remains internationally admired to this day for his humanitarian actions fighting fascism in the Spanish Civil War and his sacrifice in China while combating Japanese imperialism during the Second Sino-Japanese War⁷;

WHEREAS, the uncritical and inordinate use of his name today is very much a present issue that is worthy of revision according to modern considerations.

BE IT RESOLVED, THAT the MSS believe it appropriate to rename that which can be renamed when the individual thus honoured no longer reflects our current values.

CONSIDÉRANT QUE des exemples de changement de nom abondent en médecine^{5,6},

CONSIDÉRANT QUE de nombreuses autres figures moins connues provenant du passé de McGill méritent d'être connues et célébrées pour leurs accomplissements, par exemple Norman Bethune, un chirurgien thoracique qui oeuvrait à l'Hôpital royal Victoria et qui demeure admiré internationalement à ce jour pour ses actions humanitaires à l'encontre du fascisme dans la guerre civile espagnole et son sacrifice en Chine alors qu'il combattait l'impérialisme japonais pendant la seconde guerre sino-japonaise⁷,

CONSIDÉRANT QUE l'usage immodéré et exempt de critique de son nom aujourd'hui est un enjeu très présent qui mérite d'être reconsidéré avec un regard contemporain,

IL EST RÉSOLU QUE le MSS croit qu'il est approprié de rebaptiser ce qui peut l'être lorsque l'individu honoré ne reflète plus les valeurs contemporaines.

⁴ Shrager JB (1991). Three women at Johns Hopkins: private perspectives on medical coeducation in the 1890s. *Ann Intern Med*, 115:564-9.

⁵ Woywodt A, Matteson EL (2006). Wegener's granulomatosis—probing the untold past of the man behind the eponym. *Rheumatology*, 45:1303-6.

⁶ Falk RJ, Gross WL, Guillevin L, Hoffman GS, Jayne DR, Jennette JC, Kallenberg CG, Luqmani R, Mahr AD, Matteson EL, Merkel PA, Specks U, Watts RA; American College of Rheumatology; American Society of Nephrology; European League Against Rheumatism (2011). Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (Wegener's): an alternative name for Wegener's granulomatosis. *Arthritis Rheum*, 63:863-4.

⁷ Deslauriers J, Goulet D (2015). The medical life of Henry Norman Bethune. *Can Respir J*, 22:312.



BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT the MSS recognize that Sir William Osler, while a pioneer in medical education at McGill, should no longer receive such recognition at the present time, given our evolving social norms that do not endorse such things as white supremacy and sexism^{8,9}.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT the MSS affirm that there can be exceptions to this rule, such as the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, given that Osler's personal collection forms its backbone and that his ashes are kept in the library¹⁰.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT the MSS advocate that such eponyms be renamed to be more descriptive, and that some locations named after him be named in honour of other meritorious McGill alumni and faculty.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT that the MSS urge McGill University and the McGill community to exercise self-reflection about the way Sir William Osler is glorified and how his name is uncritically used.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT that the MSS Executive Council advocate for the aforementioned objectives to the Faculty of Medicine, the McGill University Health Centre

IL EST ÉGALEMENT RÉSOLU QUE le MSS reconnaît que Sir William Osler, malgré qu'il soit un pionnier de l'éducation médicale à McGill, ne devrait pas recevoir une telle reconnaissance de nos jours, étant donnée l'évolution des normes sociales, qui n'acceptent plus la suprématie blanche et le sexisme^{8,9}.

IL EST ÉGALEMENT RÉSOLU QUE le MSS affirme que des exceptions à cette règle sont possible, notamment en ce qui a trait à la Bibliothèque Osler de l'histoire de la médecine, puisque la collection personnelle d'Osler en forme la base, et que les cendres d'Osler y reposent.

IL EST ÉGALEMENT RÉSOLU QUE le MSS s'exprime en faveur d'une modification de ses éponymes pour des termes plus descriptifs, et que certains lieux portant son nom soient nommés en l'honneur d'autres diplômés et professeurs méritoires de McGill.

IL EST ÉGALEMENT RÉSOLU QUE le MSS presse l'Université McGill et sa communauté d'exercer une autocritique quant à la façon dont Sir William Osler est glorifié et dont son nom est immodérément utilisé.

IL EST ÉGALEMENT RÉSOLU QUE le conseil exécutif du MSS exprime les positions ci-dessus auprès de la Faculté de Médecine, le Centre de santé universitaire McGill et

⁸ Woywodt A, Matteson E (2007). Should eponyms be abandoned? Yes. *BMJ*, 335:424.

⁹ Strous RD, Edelman MC (2007). Eponyms and the Nazi era: time to remember and time for change. *Isr Med Assoc J*, 9:207-14.

¹⁰ McGill Library (2018). *About the Osler Library of the History of Medicine*. [online] Available at: <https://mcgill.ca/library/branches/osler/about> [Accessed 23 Nov. 2018].



MEDICAL STUDENTS' SOCIETY of McGill University

L'ASSOCIATION des ÉTUDIANT(E)S en MÉDECINE de l'Université McGill

and other relevant organs within McGill University and the City of Montreal. d'autres organes touchés au sein de l'Université et de la Ville de Montréal.

Moved—proposé: Ziyu Xiao, Class of 2020

Seconded—secondé: André Lametti, Class of 2020

Other sources consulted—*Autres sources consultées:*

1. Wallis F (1997). Piety and prejudice. In his respect for the Jewish people, Osler was less a man of his time than a man of his profession. *CMAJ*, 156:1549-51.