

**Frank Myron Guttman and Alexander Wright. *The Sir Mortimer B. Davis Jewish General Hospital*. Xiv+330 pp., plus illus. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2018. \$65 (cloth). ISBN 9780773553064**

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Almost 30 years ago I wrote a review essay on hospital history in the *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* that oddly still appears to have historiographic traction. Amongst other things, I hinted at the likelihood of this subfield of medical history taking off in Canada. During subsequent decades extremely solid scholarly studies of major hospitals in Canada, in particular in Ontario, were indeed published in scholarly journals and by academic presses. Similarly, the fine work by Annmarie Adams and her medical architectural historian colleagues was an additional boost.

Most recently, a slew of studies that pertain to Montreal hospitals have appeared under the imprint of McGill-Queens University Press, including the book under review here: *The Sir Mortimer B. Davis Jewish General Hospital*. Thus hospital history is certainly *alive* in Canada, but is it *well*? Perhaps not. On the one hand, David Wright's account of Toronto SickKids hospital (University of Toronto Press, 2016) maintains a high scholarly standard, while on the other hand *The General: A History of the Montreal General Hospital* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016) edited by Joseph Hanaway and John H. Burgess was pretty well panned by most reviewers (including myself) for its amateurish approach and historical naïveté.

Unfortunately, this study of Montreal's Jewish General Hospital is less aligned with the former and more akin with the latter. The book's lack of an index and a bibliography, along with its skimpy endnotes further diminish its scholarly value.

Readers also ought to know that most of this book was previously published in 1984 in a hospital fiftieth anniversary commemorative volume by then archivist Alexander Wright; this is freely available at <http://jgh.ca/en/archivesourtributeeverlastingen>. So what do you get when you pay \$65 for the current book? Basically two new chapters by Frank Guttman (who is a retired pediatric surgeon): one on Jewish hospital across the world and a second on Jews and medicine; biographical tributes to hospital benefactors such as Mortimer Davis, Allan Bronfman, and Samuel Cohen; and recent facts and figures describing the hospital growth and its notable (mostly male) doctors. This blend of new and old material serves to describe the origins, growth, and eventual success of an overtly Jewish institution in sometimes anti-Semitic Québec culture. Many of these achievements are attributable to the generosity and tenacity of the Jewish community in Montreal to see their hospital succeed; much can also be attributed to the fact Montreal Jews could be at ease in this hospital that observed Jewish cultural, religious, and food traditions, in addition to the high quality of health care it offered.

Yet with the increasing multiculturalism of Canada and Montreal, one senses from this book a feeling of a socio-medical tradition under stress: "The

Jewish General Hospital's links with both the Jewish population of Montreal and the community in general have always been strong. If the hospital is to continue to provide a level of care so in accordance with the aspirations and needs of the particular group it serves, this relationship, ever a priority among the Jewish General's leaders, must continue to be nurtured as it has been in the past" (173).

That this theme of survival and assimilation is not more fully explored in this book is perhaps a missed opportunity. Across North America, the number of distinctly Jewish hospitals has dwindled from hundreds to a few for a variety of reasons. The decline of virulent anti-Semitism is one factor, including the open acceptance of Jewish doctors on to the staff of non-Jewish hospitals who were once barred. Another factor is the economics of institutional survival through hospital mergers that often involve once "rival" Jewish, Protestant, or Roman Catholic hospitals joining forces to become a more denominationally neutral single organization.

In Montreal, the hospital merger movement may have played out differently, but it still may have left the Mortimer B. Davis Jewish General Hospital in a quandary. On one side of the city has arisen MUHC (McGill University Health Centre), the so-called purpose built "super hospital" that absorbed most of the well-established anglophone institutions. While

elsewhere in town is an organization with (ironically?) the mirror image acronym CHUM (Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal). This project when completed will also be a "super hospital" complex resulting from the absorption of Montreal's main francophone (and Catholic) hospitals that were affiliated with the city's other university with a medical school. The Jewish General, perhaps forced to take a side, is affiliated with McGill University.

In that earlier essay review I talked up the notion of narratives of individual hospitals, now I would suggest a more synthetic historical approach, especially for urban centres that have one or more medical schools as is the case in Montreal. Perhaps the time has come to consider how hospitals interact (or not) with each other, with their local communities, with affiliated medical schools and their training objectives, and with grant-funded research projects. In short, not to describe a hospital in isolation, but to study historically the institutional ecosystem of hospitals and academic medicine in particular locales and cultures. Edward Shorter's mammoth study *Partnership for Excellence: Medicine at the University of Toronto and Academic Hospitals* (University of Toronto Press, 2013) whatever its flaws, might help point the way.

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