

the founding of

Collegium Aesculapium

The 1980s were a time

of upheaval in the practice of medicine as issues of abortion, changing social values and the cost of medical care were capturing most of the media time. Clearly the media-perceived issues of health care were being promulgated in a differing direction than the knowledge of ethical and technological issues. Health care professionals who were active in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also faced the challenge of balancing their professional responsibilities with family and Church responsibilities. Often, their views differed from changing social values, sometimes resulting in being singled out for derision and verbal attacks. There seemed no place for clinical health care provider who was a Church member to turn to discuss professional foundational issues that are scripturally and doctrinally based.

When Bruce Woolley, Pharm.D., became director of the BYU Student Health Center on May 1, 1980, one of his first mandates from the university was to increase physician-based medical care for the students. This was a formidable task without any kind of database of Church-member health professionals. Dr. Woolley spoke to Larry Noble, M.D., M.P.H., a Provo, Utah ophthalmologist, about the difficulty in recruiting such physicians to the BYU Health Center. They also discussed a need they perceived among colleagues for an organization of health professionals who were members or friends of the Church.

For the previous few years, ophthalmologists who were Church members had been holding a “family home evening” oriented dinner at each of the annual American

Academy of Ophthalmology meetings. This idea was thought to potentially serve as a starting template for the proposed worldwide organization. Dr. Noble recommended that they contact Robert H. Hales, M.D., another Provo, Utah ophthalmologist who had regularly attended these meetings. In addition, in a conversation with Dr. Woolley, BYU professor Rex Wadham mentioned that his wife’s uncle, Roger S. Hiatt, M.D., was the chair of the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Tennessee in Memphis and recommended that he speak with him.

On June 18, 1982, Dr. Woolley, Dr. Noble, Dr. Hales, and Dr. Hiatt met to explore establishing an organization of health care professionals associated with the Church. The outcome of that session was a decision to establish an organization to accomplish the following:

1. Provide a forum for gospel centered professional discovery
2. Accomplish Church service as called upon
3. Assist students who are members of the Church throughout the world who are interested in providing clinical health care
4. Provide an avenue of service to people and groups nationally and internationally through health education and direct service

The formal organizational meeting was held on BYU campus on October 16, 1982 under the sponsorship of the BYU Alumni Association, the BYU College of Biology

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and Agriculture, and the BYU Student Health Center. There were about 30 physicians in attendance, and Chase Peterson, M.D., then president of the University of Utah, spoke to the group. Dr. Peterson reaffirmed the need for such an organization, but cautioned that the organization must never be perceived as political in nature and should not become involved in advocating any concept peripheral to its founding principles.

Permission was sought and granted to use the Church's Relief Society list of names of health professionals residing in English-speaking stakes, and to invite them to a meeting to be held in Park City, Utah. From February 9-12, 1983, more than 200 health professionals attended the Park City meeting, where Elder Marian D. Hanks of the Presidency of the Seventy expressed his support for the organization.

The name Collegium Aesculapium was conceived and presented by the founders and was readily adopted. The name is a Latin-derived statement of “colleagues in healing.” Because the temples of Aesculapius were sanctuaries of healing in ancient Greece, the name Aesculapius has become synonymous with physician/healer.

Shortly after the Park City meeting, Dr. Woolley, Dr. Hales, Dr. Noble and Dr. John C. Nelson met with President Gordon B. Hinckley of the First Presidency to discuss the newly formed organization. With Dr. Woolley as spokesman, they committed to President Hinckley that Collegium Aesculapium would not use the Church's or BYU's name, nor ask the Church for money. Collegium would not presume to initiate or carry out any Church-related program or activity unless invited. Most of all, Collegium would always be completely loyal and devoted

to the principles and doctrines of the Church. Over the ensuing years, Collegium Aesculapium has remained true to its commitment to President Hinckley in order that Collegium may be a jewel in the crown of righteousness, humanitarian service, and undeviating devotion in the Lord's kingdom.

In an article in the premiere issue of the *Journal of Collegium Aesculapium*, Collegium's first president, Dr. Hales, wrote the following:

“Collegium Aesculapium has been organized to meet the expressed needs of [health care professionals] who are members or friends of the Church and who wish to associate and serve with friends and colleagues of high moral and ethical integrity... Many physicians [who are members of the Church] have an ability to see the whole man in terms of the emotional and spiritual as well as the physical. It is through this gospel perspective that they are in a unique position to give support to each other to promote education, and to serve the Church and the world. They desire to put the teachings of the gospel into their daily lives.

“In the words of Mosiah: ‘I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.’ (Mosiah 4:26).”¹

History prepared by Bruce H. Woolley, PHARM.D.

1. Hales, R.H. *The Journal of Collegium Aesculapium*. December 1983, p. 66-67.