

3-1972

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Recommended Citation

Block, Melvin A. (1972) "The Surgeon's Left Hand," *Henry Ford Hospital Medical Journal* : Vol. 20 : No. 1 , 51.

Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.henryford.com/hfhmedjournal/vol20/iss1/8>

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NOTES AND COMMENTS I

The Surgeon's Left Hand

Melvin A. Block, M.D.*

Exposure which provides visualization of appropriate anatomic structures is an essential requisite for adequate, safe, and expeditious surgery. This can be obtained by the use of proper incisions and by suitable retraction of adjacent tissue by instruments or by the hands of assistants. However, critical exposure is best accomplished by the surgeon's coordinated second hand, which is the left hand for most individuals. Although it would seem inconceivable that the left hand would not innately be used as effectively as possible in performing any operation, some individuals must acquire proficient and coordinated use of the second hand.

The young surgeon performing his first operations frequently encounters difficulty in utilizing his left hand effectively. Just as the student pianist usually starts with only one hand, so the surgical intern or resident usually concentrates on use of his dominant hand. The secondary hand either rests aimlessly on the patient or instinctively grabs a retractor. Just as the accomplished pianist acquires reflex precision with both hands, so the surgeon acquires reflex precision in using both

hands. In the training of surgeons, technical proficiency in the use of the second, or left hand, is to be emphasized and developed. The experienced and adept surgeon is identified in part by the facility with which he utilizes this hand.

When making an incision, the surgeon uses the left hand to provide retraction of tissues, freeing fascial layers properly for transection and exposing vessels for application of hemostats. In performing a cholecystectomy from the patient's right side, the surgeon's left hand usually places traction on and rotates the gallbladder to permit accurate isolation and division of the cystic vessels and duct by the right hand. The surgeon's left hand identifies the pedicle of the left gastric artery in performing a gastrectomy. Proprioceptive sensations from the left hand direct action by the right hand. The left hand of the surgeon facilitates almost every step in any operative procedure.

Individuals vary in degree of ambidexterity, but that with which a surgeon is endowed should be developed to its highest degree of effectiveness. Most surgeons, in fact, would appreciate a third coordinated hand.

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