



Joseph E. Kerschner, MD

## Knowledge Changing Life: A History of the Medical College of Wisconsin, 1893-2019

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‘**W**hen the time comes to write a full history of medical education in Milwaukee, it will be said of the medical schools in Milwaukee that the night seemed darkest before the dawn.’<sup>1(pv)</sup>

This prophetic statement, published in an editorial in the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* in January 1913 – more than 108 years ago – provides the epigraph to the newly published *Knowledge Changing Life: A History of the Medical College of Wisconsin, 1893-2019*, and refers to the precarious situation faced by the Medical College of Wisconsin’s (MCW) for-profit predecessor institutions in late 1912. At that time, the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons (founded in 1893) and the Milwaukee Medical College (founded in 1894) faced closure due to financial losses and accreditation downgrades. But the perseverance of Milwaukee’s civic leaders, working with Marquette University to transfer the student bodies and physical assets of the two medical schools into the newly formed Marquette University School of Medicine, helped ensure the coming of the dawn.

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In 1967, Marquette ended its sponsorship of the Medical School, which became a private freestanding institution renamed the Marquette School of Medicine. In 1970, the institution was renamed the Medical College

and health care facilities, and a wide range of philanthropists and donors. The book also serves as a foundation for MCW’s future as we actively reimagine our institution – thinking generatively and creatively about how to edu-

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of Wisconsin, but still faced financial challenges; however, leaders and philanthropists throughout the region and state came together to help solve these difficulties. In 1978, MCW moved to the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center campus – its current home – and began a period of extraordinary growth which continues to this day.

Woven throughout *Knowledge Changing Life’s* 720 pages, meticulously researched and written by MCW’s chief historian, Richard N. (Dick) Katschke, are rich tales of MCW’s 125+ years of accomplishments, challenges and controversies, as well as the institution’s critical relationships with Marquette, Milwaukee County, Milwaukee’s hospitals

and the next generation of health and science thought leaders, how research is conducted and applied, how healthcare is delivered, how we engage with our community, and how to collaborate and partner.

Throughout its history, MCW has created new knowledge that has changed lives through training the next generation of physicians, scientists and other healthcare professionals, through biomedical research, clinical excellence, specialty expertise and transformative clinical breakthroughs, and through bidirectional interaction with the communities we serve.

The *Wisconsin Medical Journal’s* January 1913 editorial also wisely noted, “Of course, it

is not possible to create a Class A+ medical school in the twinkling of an eye. The evolution of the medical department of Marquette University from the chaos of this revolution into a thoroughly satisfactory school will take time. But the spirit in which the work is being undertaken is so earnest and sincere that there is every reason to hope for a bright and creditable future for it.”<sup>1(p22)</sup>

And a bright and creditable future it has been! As noted in the Preface, written by John R. Raymond, Sr., MD, MCW’s president and chief executive officer:

MCW is an institution that surmounted financial deficits [and] accreditation challenges...to become a jewel in the crowns of Wisconsin and the nation. MCW attributes its triumphs over adversity to the supportive citizens of the Milwaukee area and throughout the state; dedicated civic leaders and elected officials; generous donors; strong academic and clinical partners; and loyal alumni, students, faculty and staff. These individuals supported MCW during the difficult times, but also during the promising times when MCW had opportunities to transform medicine both locally and globally. As a result, MCW has harnessed the knowledge and talents of its faculty physicians, staff, healthcare professionals and scientists to improve the quality of health and the lives of those we serve.<sup>1(pix)</sup>

The Wisconsin Medical Society is mentioned in numerous places throughout the book. On page 55, Katschke notes that MCW’s Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences traces its origins to the first basic science graduate degrees awarded on June 17, 1936. On that date, Stanley J. Seeger received a Master of Science degree from the Marquette University School of Medicine after having earned his MD degree at Marquette years before. Seeger was a prominent Milwaukee pediatrician who went on to become chief of staff at Columbia Hospital and then president of the Wisconsin Medical Society.<sup>1(p55)</sup>

On page 59, Katschke shares that the Marquette University School of Medicine

joined with the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and the Wisconsin Medical Society in 1934 to successfully lobby against three bills to ban animal research, and another bill that would have required the burial of unclaimed bodies instead of their release to the medical schools.<sup>1(p59)</sup>

On page 91, Katschke writes that at the beginning of the 1950s, Medical School faculty members began teaching brief, postgraduate courses at local hospitals under the sponsorship of the Medical Society of Milwaukee County. The program expanded, and the Medical School faculty members created “circuit sites” across the state where they taught courses in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Medical School and the Wisconsin Medical Society.<sup>1(p91)</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, in 1969, at the height of the Medical School’s financial crisis, the Wisconsin Medical Society purchased full-page newspaper ads in 10 Wisconsin cities which alerted the public, saying, “Unless the Marquette School of Medicine gets financial help now...it may be forced to close its doors!”<sup>1(p124)</sup>

And, most enduring, at MCW’s first White Coat Ceremony in 1999, the Wisconsin Medical Society began the tradition of giving the white lab coats to first-year medical students – which continues to this day.<sup>1(p294)</sup>

It is impossible to capture the richness of the book’s anecdotes, tidbits of information, “portraits” of historical figures and decade-

by-decade discussions of achievements, triumphs and challenges – but MCW alumni in particular will find this a fascinating walk down memory lane. *Knowledge Changing Life* is now available for purchase at [www.mcw.edu/historybook](http://www.mcw.edu/historybook).

As Katschke concludes: “Clearly the dawn has arrived for the Medical College of Wisconsin. By the end of the 21st century’s second decade, MCW has emerged as a national and international leader in health science education, research, patient care and community engagement. Its more than 18,000 alumni have elevated medical care in almost every county in the state, and every state in the nation. MCW faculty members and alumni have made major discoveries in every specialty and sub-specialty of medicine and have been selected by their peers to lead the nation’s major health organizations. MCW faculty physicians and alumni have developed new patient care treatments and strategies that have saved countless lives worldwide.”<sup>1(p624)</sup>

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## REFERENCE

1. Katsche R. *Knowledge Changing Life: A History of the Medical College of Wisconsin, 1893-2019*. Medical College of Wisconsin with production assistance by Marquette University Press; 2021.

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