

birth rate means that there are fewer young people relative to the number of seniors. As the population of Canada ages, it becomes ever more important to consider how society can continue to benefit from the abilities and experiences of our older citizens.

Interestingly, the renowned Canadian physician Sir William Osler, whose biography is included in this book, was not a strong proponent of productivity in old age. He believed that most significant contributions are made before age 40 and, in fact, at one point was mistakenly believed to be promoting euthanasia for the elderly.<sup>1</sup>

Most readers of *Old Endeavour* will probably use it as a reference book. The entries are arranged in alphabetical order, but for some reason, the book lists the names at the end of the book in an index rather than in a table of contents at the beginning. It might have been useful if the index provided additional means of referencing the entries, for example, by specialty or nationality. As well, some of the entries do not clearly indicate what contributions the subject made after age 65. If this information had been provided in point form, for example, this book would be easier to use. In addition, it is unfortunate that the book does not include photographs of the subjects.

As Gibson himself points out, there are important questions about productivity in old age that cannot be answered by a collection of biographies. Does continued activity lead to greater discoveries? Why do some physicians continue to work and do research beyond the point when most of their colleagues have retired to the south of France or the golf courses of Florida? And perhaps most importantly, how can the profession accommodate and encourage senior physicians to remain vital and valued members of the medical community well into the latter part of life?

**Lara Hazelton MD**  
Family physician  
Halifax, NS

#### REFERENCE

1. Silverman ME, Murray TJ, Bryan CS. *The Quotable Osler*. Philadelphia: ACP Press; 2002.

## Book review

# Evolution at the St. John Ambulance

### The Maple Leaf and the White Cross

Christopher McCreery

Dundurn Press; 2008

332 pp \$50 ISBN 978-1-55002-740-2

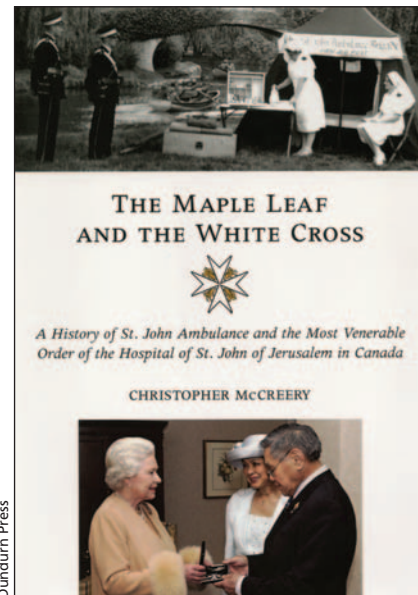
The St. John Ambulance has been providing Canadians with first-aid training since 1883, but relatively little has been written about its work. This year, as it celebrates 125 years in Canada, the Order of St. John decided to change that by publishing *The Maple Leaf and the White Cross*, Christopher McCreery's well-structured history of an organization that came of age in the last century and is searching for new roles in this one.

The Order's roots stretch back to a group of monks founded in 12th-century Jerusalem to treat pilgrims making the trek to the Holy Land. Almost 1000 years later, the Canadian "priory" of the St. John Ambulance provides everything from therapy dog services to emergency preparedness programs. However, its bread-and-butter work has always been first-aid training.

The St. John Ambulance — or at least the work it does — is well known to many of Canada's emergency physicians and first responders because its 6000 certified instructors train more than 550 000 Canadians in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation every year.

The book recounts one physician's reaction a century ago when a railway employee's life was saved by a quick-thinking conductor who had received such training. "I have not the least doubt but that Sectionman Courchaine would have bled to death had it not been for the timely and efficient assistant of Mr. Leach..." he said. "All railroad men should be so trained."

The book devotes separate chapters to the organization's extensive involvement in both world wars. In the First World War, the St. John Ambulance in Canada sent more than 400 voluntary aid detachment personnel overseas. These mostly "Anglo-Protestant, middle class, unmar-



Dundurn Press

ried women, ranging in age from mid-twenties to early thirties," provided nursing, rehabilitation and other help.

The book also opens a window onto Canadian medical history, particularly horrific events such as the Halifax explosion of 1917, where St. John Ambulance staff treated patients whose faces had been "torn to tatters as if clawed by a tiger." Eight staff members were given the unenviable task of searching for 140 missing children.

The St. John Ambulance has had some tough times recently, particularly early this century when the technology sector's flameout hit its investments "particularly hard" and led to the sale of its national headquarters in Ottawa. Today, it is trying to adapt to a changing world by searching for new markets. One example is the 72 Hour Emergency Ready Kit, which is designed to provide support during the first 3 days of a natural disaster or similar crisis. More than 30 000 kits were purchased in 2006.

This well-referenced history does justice to an organization that has served Canada well.

**Pat Sullivan BA**  
Medical journalist  
Richmond, Ont.

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.081650