

History of Neurology at Dartmouth Prior to 1980

When he joined the Hitchcock Clinic in 1939, Dr. Ralph Hunter became the first neurologist at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital, Dartmouth Medical School, and in the state of New Hampshire. Born in Hanover, Dr. Hunter trained in neurology at the Massachusetts General Hospital where, as a resident, the Harvard neurology professor, Raymond D. Adams, was his intern. Dr. Hunter remained the only neurologist at the Hitchcock Clinic throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Beginning around 1960, Dr. John McKenna also practiced neurology at the Hitchcock Clinic for a decade or so until illness forced his retirement. Dr. Hunter retired in 1975 and died in 2000.

In the 1960s, Dartmouth Medical School planned to restore years 3 and 4 of clinical education which had been suspended just before World War I following the publication of the Flexner Report. In 1968, Dr. Thomas Almy was recruited from Cornell University Medical College to chair the newly formed Department of Medicine. He recruited Dr. Alexander Reeves, a junior faculty member at the University of Rochester, to develop a Neurology Section in the Department of Medicine, a neurology clerkship for Dartmouth medical students, and a neurology residency program. Dr. Reeves arrived in 1971 and began building neurology programs at Dartmouth. The neurology student clerkship started in 1972. The DHMC 3-year neurology residency program began in 1973 with two residents, Drs. Carl Sadowsky and Richard Sullivan, the same year as the first class of Dartmouth medical students graduated in the modern era.

Dr. Reeves began building the neurology faculty as soon as he arrived. In 1972, Dr. Richard Nordgren was recruited from the University of Rochester to practice pediatric and adult neurology. Dr. Edward Valenstein was recruited from Harvard to join the neurology faculty in 1973 but moved to the University of Florida after two years where he remained for his career. Dr. Barry Levin was recruited from Cornell to develop a neurology service at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, VT and served on the faculty from 1974-1977 when he moved to the VA Medical Center in East Orange, NJ where he spent his career. Dr. Colin Allen was recruited from the University of Rochester and served on the Dartmouth-Hitchcock neurology faculty from 1975-2008. Dr. José Ochoa, who was recruited from the National Hospital at Queens Square, served on the neurology faculty from 1975-2004. Dr. James Bernat, a DHMC neurology resident (1974-1977) joined the neurology faculty in 1977 to take the VA Medical Center position with the departure of Dr. Levin. Dr. Dick Hoefnagel practiced pediatric neurology in the Department of Pediatrics from the 1960s until the 1990s, and died in 2013.

At the time of the founding of the Northern New England Neurological Society in 1980 (then called the NH-VT Neurological Society), the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Neurology Section consisted of Drs. Reeves, Nordgren, Allen, Ochoa, and Bernat. Teaching services at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital and the VA Medical Center in White River Junction trained neurologists and educated medical students. Dr. Bernat was a founder and councilor of the NH-VT Neurological Society in 1980.