

year—but not for all. Those of us connected with the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund know only too well the sadness that follows unexpected tragedy within our profession. The hardship that may follow seems magnified at this time of year—all the more poignant when young children are involved.

Your generosity last Christmas enabled your Fund to distribute additional seasonal support of £50 000 to help bring some semblance of happiness and dignity to those doctors, and particularly their bereaved families, less fortunate than us. Each year our general grants total over £800 000.

The Fund always seeks to give this extra help at Christmas with gifts to the children involved. May I therefore ask for your support again this Christmas.

Contributions marked 'Christmas Appeal' may be sent to the Chief Executive Officer of the RMBF at 24 King's

Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 8QG, or to the Treasurer of your local guild of this Fund. Thank you.

Rodney Sweetnam

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Correction

E-biomed

In this editorial (September 1999 *JRSM*, pp. 441–442) the Website for E-biomed, now renamed PubMed Central, should have been given as:

<http://www.nih.gov/welcome/director/ebiomed/53ebio.htm>



Ephraim McDowell

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This month in history

On 25 December 1809, a Kentucky surgeon, Ephraim McDowell (1771–1830), performed an historic operation while an angry mob with guns and rope in hand waited outside. The operation had been denounced by the local church. The celebrated patient, Mrs Jane Todd Crawford, was a 47-year-old woman who had thought herself pregnant and had come to Dr McDowell for 'labour pains' which had continued for a long time. Two physicians had even proclaimed that she was in for a difficult delivery. McDowell, who had studied medicine in Edinburgh, was the only surgeon in Danville. On 13 December 1809, when summoned to see Mrs Crawford, McDowell determined that she had an enlarged ovary on one side. The patient consented to undergo an experiment never previously attempted. The operation took place without anaesthesia in the front room of Ephraim McDowell's home on Christmas day. McDowell took about 15 pounds of a gelatinous substance, then cut the fallopian tube and 'extracted the sack which weighed seven pounds and one half'. The whole operation took about 25 minutes. In twenty-five days Mrs Crawford returned home in good health. The plucky surgeon survived, as did his patient, and the world's first ovariectomy gained its place in gynaecological history.

Venita Jay