



## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

# **The Comarr Memorial Award for Distinguished Clinical Service: The Legacy of A. Estin Comarr, MD**

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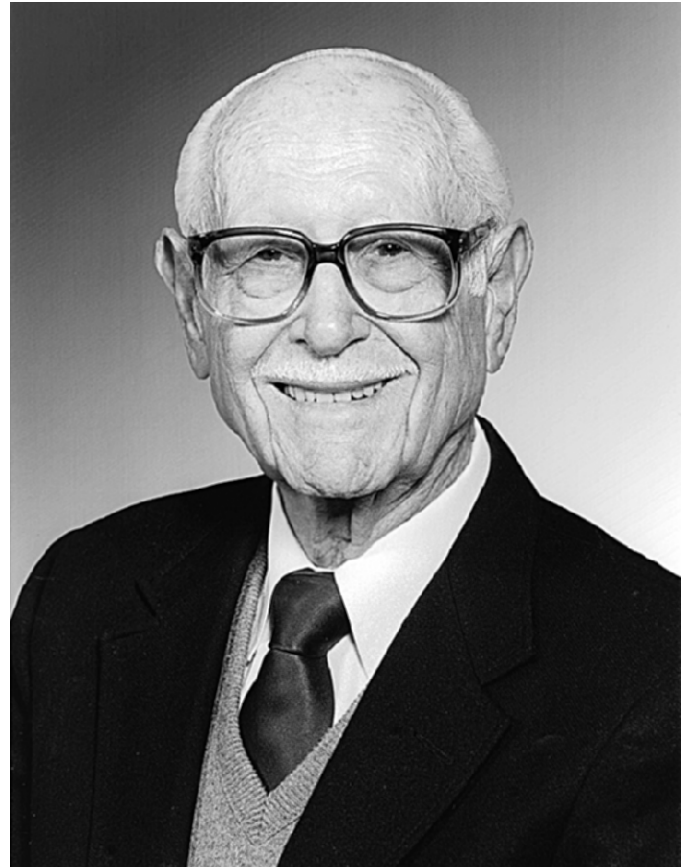
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Since 1993, the American Paraplegia Society has acknowledged exceptional dedication and achievement in the clinical care of individuals with spinal cord injury (SCI) with the A. Estin Comarr Memorial Award for Distinguished Clinical Service. A pioneer in medical care, education, and clinical research in our field, Dr Comarr's legacy honors all of you who have dedicated your careers to improving the lives of people with SCI.

Born in Chicago in 1915, Comarr attended the University of Southern California and Chicago Medical School. He trained in Cleveland hospitals, specializing in urology. In 1945, after serving as a battalion surgeon in the Third Armored Division in World War II, he joined the staff of Birmingham General Hospital in Van Nuys, California (now the Long Beach VA Hospital) (1,2). There began his long and fruitful collaboration with neuro-urologist Ernest Bors, MD, another pioneer in the care of veterans paralyzed by SCI (2–5).

Dr Comarr (photo) contributed to the formation of paraplegia centers, which provided specialty care for veterans disabled by SCIs sustained in World War II. With the founding of these centers, the Veterans Administration “actually lit the torch for research and comprehensive care of these patients,” Dr Comarr emphasized. Before the VA's commitment, people with SCIs were “condemned to death from various complications...” (6). Post-World War I, 60% of these individuals died within 3 years of their injury (6), noted Comarr and Eltorai, while others were left to cope with serious complications with little hope for improvement. It was not until the mid-1930s that neurosurgeon Donald Munro, MD, inspired others by organizing the first ward dedicated to the holistic care of patients with SCI at Boston City Hospital, showing the medical establishment that with attentive care and targeted research, people with SCI could live longer lives of better quality (2).

In addition to caring for patients with complex medical issues, Dr Comarr was dedicated to research and professional education. He authored or co-authored textbooks, chapters, and more than 120 articles in the



*A. Estin Comarr, MD, 1915–1996.*

field of spinal cord medicine. His seminal text, co-authored with Dr Bors more than 35 years ago, “Neurological Urology, Physiology of Micturition, its Neurological Disorders and Sequelae”, remains a standard today (7). He also lectured widely on the management of medical complications, especially urological. A founding member of APS, Dr Comarr was the society's first president (1954) and first honorary member. He also served as president in 1955 and 1967. Fittingly, in 1983, Dr Comarr delivered the first Donald Munro Memorial Lecture, which was established by APS to recognize Dr Munro's fundamental contributions to the modern model of SCI care (8).

Today, we continue to recognize Dr Comarr's contributions to spinal cord medicine with this epony-

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mous award while acknowledging the professionals who carry his legacy into a future now bright with promise and hope. I can think of no better closing than the words of Dr Comarr's widow, Ruth, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of APS (2):

*"I hope my husband's legacy will find continuance in all your combined efforts. With the advent of new medicines and the like, which did not exist in Estin's time, I know you will make great strides in the future."*

#### REFERENCES

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2. The American Paraplegia Society 1954–2004: Our legacy, our future. *J Spinal Cord Med*. 2004;27(4):287–303.
3. Donovan WH. Spinal cord injury—past, present and future. *J Spinal Cord Med*. 2007;30(2):85–100.
4. Bodner DR. The Bors Award: Legacy of A. Estin Comarr, MD. *J Spinal Cord Med*. 2009;32(1):1–2.
5. Eltorai IM. History of spinal cord medicine. In: Lin V, ed. *Spinal Cord Medicine Principles and Practice*. New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2003:1–14.

6. Comarr AE, Eltorai I. History of the American Paraplegia Society. APS archives; unpublished.
7. Bors EH, Comarr AE. *Neurological Urology, Physiology of Micturition, its Neurological Disorders and Sequelae*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press, 1971.
8. Comarr AE. The Donald Munro Memorial Lecture. *J Am Paraplegia Soc*. 1984;7(1):10–12.

#### Recipients of the Comarr Award for Clinical Service: 1993–2009

- A. Estin Comarr, MD
- John George, MD
- John Bach, MD
- 2001 Steven C. Kirshblum, MD
- 2002 Robert Woolsey, MD
- 2003 Randal R. Betz, MD
- 2004 Margaret Hammond, MD
- 2007 Donald R. Bodner, MD
- 2008 Joel A. DeLisa, MD, MS
- 2009 Jay V. Subbarao, MD, MS