

Evory Kennedy

Born: 1806
President: 1853-1855
Died: 1886

Evory Kennedy was a notable Dublin obstetrician. He succeeded the famous Robert Collins (qv) as Master of the Rotunda Hospital in 1833 at the youthful age of 27. In the early part of the nineteenth century there was, in Dublin, grinding poverty; maternal mortality from sepsis was the scourge of obstetric practice. It was Collins and Kennedy who set out some of the principles of preventing the problem; cleanliness, ventilation, rotation of wards, painting of wards, frequent changes of bedding, and purifying the atmosphere with chloride gas. It was documented by them that while maternal death from sepsis could be devastatingly high in the hospital it was highly unusual in private practice where the mothers were delivered at home. While Kennedy, during his Mastership, seemed to know what to do about the problem, he was not always successful in convincing the hospital governors.

The work of Collins and Kennedy was recognized by Ignaz Semmelweis and data from Dublin is quoted in his publications. Semmelweis, who worked in Vienna, is largely credited with the reduction of puerperal sepsis and has been described as the 'savior of mothers'. He dramatically reduced the incidence of puerperal fever by insisting on hand washing. His work, however, was not recognized until after his premature death.

It was another President, William Stokes (qv), who is credited with the introduction of the stethoscope to Irish medical practice. However, it was Kennedy who introduced it to obstetric medicine with his book, *Observations on obstetric auscultation* (Dublin, 1833). He was the first to realize the importance of monitoring the foetal heart. Following his Mastership, and on the strength of his work on foetal auscultation, he applied for the chair of obstetrics in Edinburgh but was narrowly beaten by the famous Sir James Young Simpson.

Kennedy had a large private practice and continued to involve himself in innovation and writing. He was notable in recognizing the importance of diseases of women and opened a gynaecological ward in the Rotunda. He published widely and was interested in education, founding the Dublin Obstetric Society (now incorporated into the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland).

The presidency of Evory Kennedy was busy, and his attendance record was excellent. Much of the activity of his presidency concerned discussion on the by-laws and the examination process.

In retirement Kennedy lived in Belgood Castle, Clondalkin, and became Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of County Dublin. He ran, unsuccessfully, for Parliament and subsequently



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retired to London where he died in 1886. His funeral was held at St Ann's Church, Dublin and was attended by many Fellows of the College in official costumes, with the Bedell and College Mace.

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