Hartford Medical Society

History

The Hartford Medical Society has been in continuous existence for over 160 years. The Society’s rules, adopted September 15th of 1846, state: “The object of this Society, is to maintain the practice of Medicine and Surgery in this city upon a respectable footing; to expose the ignorance and resist the arts of quackery; and to adopt measures for the mutual improvement, pleasant intercourse, and common good of its members.” The rules were specific, not only about how meetings should be conducted, but how to enroll new members and what fees should be charged for services rendered.

The nineteenth century was a time of great change in the practice of medicine. During that century medical training went from an apprenticeship or classes where texts were learned by rote, to the beginnings of a regulated curriculum including clinical training in a hospital. The disciplines of scientific observation and experimentation were thriving and were increasingly informing medical practice. The “respectable footing” upon which the reputation of Hartford physicians rested included a library with current books and journals.

The core of the Hartford Medical Society library collection came from the Hopkins Medical Society, (1826-1844,) and members of the Hartford Medical Society donated books from their personal collections. In 1889 the library was strengthened with the acquisition of the library of the Hartford Medical Library and Journal Association which disbanded that year. From these beginnings, and with an active acquisitions budget, the collection grew to 27,445 volumes by 1965.

When the University of Connecticut Health Center opened in nearby Farmington in the early 1960s, use of the HMS library began to decline, although the Society continued its missions of outreach and collegiality. In the 1990s, members became concerned about the long-term future of the library and negotiations began with the University of Connecticut Health Center for the administrative management and eventual housing of the collection. In April of 2009, approximately 6,000 selected volumes, along with manuscripts, artifacts, and works of art was moved into a newly renovated 2,500 square foot space in the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, Connecticut. It is hoped that this history of medicine collection will enrich the education of students and further the work of researchers in various fields. The evolution of this library, begun in the early 19th century, continues into the future, a new version of its old self.