

The Essex College of Medicine and Surgery: The Long Gestation, Troubled Life, and Early Death of New Jersey's First Medical School

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In *The Essex College of Medicine and Surgery: The Long Gestation, Troubled Life, and Early Death of New Jersey's First Medical School*, physician Sandra W. Moss provides a detailed chronicle about the very short-lived initiative to establish a college of medicine in New Jersey. In this self-published book, Moss delivers a well-researched account about the various decision-making processes and intricate contingencies that ultimately doomed this educational initiative. While the school was only open for just over a year, the archival and mass-media accounts presented in the book are suggestive of a larger story about the various institutional, managerial, financial, and legal phenomena that are key historical components in understanding the politics of medical education in New Jersey.

The book's 11 body chapters are structured around the chronological organization of the archival material presented in the story. After a few quick introductory chapters about early medical education in New Jersey, the remainder of the book focuses on the years between 1942 and 1947. In this documentary history, Moss also provides readers detailed excerpts drawn from the historical record. These materials also provide useful insight into the various actors – medical professionals, stakeholders in higher education, lawyers, journalists, and state leaders – who were involved in establishing, opposing, and coping with the closure of the Essex College of Medicine and Surgery (hereafter Essex College).

The book begins with a quick account of medical education (or rather, the lack thereof) in New Jersey between the mid-18th century through the mid-20th century. Moss's account then

pivots on an important moment in American medical education reform: the 1910 publication of Albert Flexner's *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (often referred to as the *Flexner Report*) and the establishment of medical school admission quotas, which were used during the early-to-mid 20th century. It was the so-called "quota system," Moss explains, that became a "crucial part of the rhetoric" used by stakeholders invested in establishing a medical college in New Jersey (10). While the book suggests that the Essex College was partially a response to this phenomenon (and modeled on the few non-quota-system schools in the U.S. this point is unclearly sustained through the book. Nevertheless, the absence of an accredited medical school in the state, coupled with discriminatory admission practices elsewhere, are presented as two important motivating factors for Essex College stakeholders.

One of those stakeholders, and one of the book's main actors, was Dr. Adolph Koch. In addition to being a key proponent of the school, Koch – a Jewish American with a doctorate in psychology – provided the Newark brownstone that later became the location of the Essex College in 1945, and he became one of the school's top administrators. Though Koch was not alone in his efforts to create the medical school, he remained at the center of the school's quick rise and demise. According to Moss, Koch was instrumental in convincing the Board of Medical Examiners to issue the school a "license to operate" in 1942 (49). (This license, however, was *not* tantamount to accreditation – they could not administer medical degrees.) Koch was also at the helm during the school's chaotic year of existence.

From 1943 through the "stealth opening" of the school to its first students in 1945, Moss thoroughly details how Koch and his supporters gained financial, material, and legal support for the school (88). They also garnered opposition from some of the state's medical societies and elites,

stakeholders in higher education, and Rutgers University. The Essex College officially started instructing students in March of 1945, but as Moss shows, the school was immediately plagued by mismanagement, financial problems, and legal challenges and issues. In 1946, the Board of Medical Examiners demanded the school return its license to operate. As the school underwent its “death throes” in 1946 and 1947, Moss provides an extensive account of how students and lawyers sought credit for their first year at Essex College. Finally, in December of 1947, the Board of Medical Examiner voted to “discharge” the Essex College. The school was officially closed. (142; 169).

In this well-researched, self-published book, Moss documents important moments in the rise and fall of the Essex College of Medicine and Surgery. For researchers interested in New Jersey history or local histories of medicine, the book provides useful information about important actors and institutions related to debates about, and the politics surrounding, medical education in the state during the 1940s. While the research and documentation in the book is notable, it lacks important historiographical and theoretical framing necessary for understanding the broader historical significance of this story. In addition, the book's close adherence to a specific set of source materials – without significant engagement with other secondary and primary source materials – makes it difficult to assess the analyses and claims made throughout the story. Nevertheless, *The Essex College of Medicine and Surgery* – the book and the very short-lived medical education initiative in New Jersey – provides researchers a good place to start when considering the often contentious and complicated history of medical education in the Garden State.

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