Memories of a good teacher stay with us throughout our life, and we all hope that a little of their enthusiasm and wisdom stays with us too. The time-honoured apprenticeship model of surgical training, currently threatened from so many directions, is no different. Perhaps, if anything, good surgical trainers have made an even greater commitment to supporting their trainees, given the many conflicting demands on their time in the modern NHS.

Ten years ago this year the Silver Scalpel Award was created by then-President of the Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT), David O’Regan, to recognise consultants consistently delivering excellence in surgical training. In many ways it was surprising that such an award did not exist already, but with the support of the Surgical Royal Colleges and the Government’s Chief Medical Officer, this national prize has gone from strength-to-strength.

Since its inception in 1999, with the first award made in 2000, the Silver Scalpel has been unique in that the nomination, shortlisting and judging is largely led by trainees themselves. Awarded across all nine surgical specialties, it has grown to be recognised as the most notable award for excellence in surgical training.

Making the Award
Every year surgical trainees are invited to submit letters of nomination for consultants they believe have shown exemplary standards coupled with a genuine commitment to training. After letters of nomination are received in mid-September, initial shortlisting takes place in a similar way to reviewing conference abstracts. During this process the local deanery
and chief executive of the consultant's NHS Trust are also contacted to notify them of the nomination and to validate it.

These initial nominations are then ranked, with the majority going on to the interview stage. At this point ASiT Council members, themselves all surgical trainees, visit the consultant's hospital to meet with them in person and discuss the nomination. In-depth interviews are also conducted with their peers and colleagues, senior ward sister, and current surgical trainees. In particular, the interview seeks to ascertain the nominee's training ability, resourcefulness, professionalism, communication and leadership skills. Novel approaches, new ideas, and areas of best-practice are also highlighted.

Written reports of these interviews are then fed back and assessed objectively according to a standard formula. This was originally devised by David O'Regan in combination with an industrial psychologist at the Raven Department of Education in the RCSI. From this, the three highest scoring nominations are passed on to the Presidents of the Surgical Royal Colleges for them to review and recommend a prize winner. The final step in the judging process rests with the Government's Chief Medical Officer, who oversees these recommendations and confirms the award.

The NHS Trusts of all those shortlisted receive letters informing them of their employee's nomination and highlighting their achievements in delivering surgical training. The prize winner is also invited to the annual ASiT Conference to receive their award. We are very grateful to Swann-Morton who continue to support this with a very appropriate Silver Scalpel trophy. In addition, the previous year's prize winner is also invited back to speak at the ASiT Conference, and we have benefited from some excellent discussions surrounding the delivery and format of modern surgical training.

**Silver Scalpel Award Surgical Training Symposium**

As individuals and as a profession, we potentially have much to learn from those nominated for the Silver Scalpel Award. For the first time this coming November 2009, David O'Regan and Chris Munsch (Chair, JCST), with the support of ASiT, will arrange a Silver Scalpel Award Surgical Training Symposium. This unique event will bring together shortlisted consultant nominees from recent years together with a cohort of current surgical trainees representing all specialties.

The meeting aims to discuss current and future surgical training and we hope it will provide a useful forum to identify and engage with best practice. New teaching innovations, methods, and ways of delivering this amidst the many conflicts in the NHS will all be discussed. We look forward to reporting on this symposium, and we would be grateful for industry sponsorship to support this event.

**Nominations for 2010**

Nominations are now open for the next Silver Scalpel Award, which will be conferred at the ASiT Conference in March 2010. All surgical trainees are welcome to nominate active consultant trainers who they feel have shown the highest levels of excellence in surgical training. Trainees wishing to nominate should write a comprehensive letter (approximately five paragraphs) specifying the consultant’s name, department and NHS Trust, and outlining attributes you believe qualify the nominee for the award – the more information you supply, the better. This should be sent to Sarah Hartley, who, as David O'Regan's Secretary, has done a great deal to help with the administration of this award over the years.

We would also warmly welcome any other groups or organisations wanting to support the award, in particular those wishing to sponsor the Training Symposium this coming November. Please feel free to contact me at the address below for further information.

**Conclusions**

Over the past decade the Silver Scalpel Award has played a vital part in recognising trainers going the extra mile for their trainees, while at the same time promoting the highest standards of surgical training. As the annual award has become more established, we hope trainees will be forthcoming in rewarding their best trainers with a nomination. At the same time we hope that these nominees will provide a model to which current trainees will aspire to when they themselves become consultants.

At a time of constant flux in the NHS, with training increasingly squeezed by demands on service and EWTD-related working time restrictions, it is more important than ever that we recognise and reward good trainers.

**Teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools. The miracle is that at times they accomplish this impossible task.**

Haim G Ginott

**The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.**

Mark Van Doren

**The best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book.**

Anonymous

For further information on the Silver Scalpel Award, the forthcoming Symposium, or for those wishing to support either of these, please contact:

**Ed Fitzgerald**
President, Association of Surgeons in Training
The Royal College of Surgeons of England
35/43 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London, WC2A 3PE
EdwardFitzgerald@doctors.org.uk
www.asit.org

For further information about nominations, or to submit a nomination for the 2010 award (closing date Friday 25 September) please contact:

**Sarah Hartley**
Mr D J O'Regan’s Secretary,
D Floor, Jubilee Building,
Leeds General Infirmary
Great George Street, Leeds
david_o_regan@hotmail.com
Sarah.Hartley@leedsth.nhs.uk

**Teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools. The miracle is that at times they accomplish this impossible task.**

Haim G Ginott

**The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.**

Mark Van Doren

**The best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book.**

Anonymous

For further information on the Silver Scalpel Award, the forthcoming Symposium, or for those wishing to support either of these, please contact:

**Ed Fitzgerald**
President, Association of Surgeons in Training
The Royal College of Surgeons of England
35/43 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London, WC2A 3PE
EdwardFitzgerald@doctors.org.uk
www.asit.org

For further information about nominations, or to submit a nomination for the 2010 award (closing date Friday 25 September) please contact:

**Sarah Hartley**
Mr D J O'Regan’s Secretary,
D Floor, Jubilee Building,
Leeds General Infirmary
Great George Street, Leeds
david_o_regan@hotmail.com
Sarah.Hartley@leedsth.nhs.uk