

David Wendel Yandell, M.D. (1826-1898)
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David Wendel Yandell, M.D. was one of America's most respected and honored physicians of the nineteenth century. At the University of Louisville, he introduced significant medical education reforms, practiced advanced surgery, led national medical societies and gained international acclaim. Among many professional achievements and honors, the most enduring were changing clinical experience in American medical schools from pre-medical apprenticeships to formal post-graduate training, establishing outpatient clinics (dispensaries) for free care of the poor, and improving surgical practices.

Background and Family

In 1826, Yandell was born in frontier Tennessee, where his physician grandfather visited patients on horseback. When his father, Lunsford Pitts Yandell, M.D., was appointed Professor of Chemistry at Transylvania University Medical School 1831, the family moved to Lexington, Kentucky. His parents, firmly instilled values of personal responsibility and community service in young David.

In 1836-7, conflict split the Transylvania faculty. Lunsford and several faculty colleagues moved their families to Louisville, where Lunsford became founding Dean of the newly formed Louisville Medical Institute, later renamed University of Louisville.

Education

David's undergraduate studies were at private Louisville schools and a session at Centre College. In 1844, he entered the University of Louisville Medical School two-year program. There, eminent Professor Daniel Drake, M.D., emphasized care of the poor, which David thereafter championed. David was strongly influenced by Surgery Professor, Samuel Gross, M.D., who emphasized cleanliness and precision over speed, and who theorized that some unknown infectious pathogen was spread by surgeons' hands and instruments – 20 years before Pasteur and Lister. This guided Yandell's obsession with surgical cleanliness.

After graduation, Dr. Yandell spent two postdoctoral years in Britain and France, where he admired their education progress, and dispensaries serving the urban poor. He judged Parisian formal post-doctoral hospital training of graduates, called *internes*, far superior to America's system of pre-medical apprenticeships.

Early Career and Civil War Years

Yandell's return to Louisville brought a growing practice, an attending post at City Hospital and appointment as Dissector and body procurer for Dr. Gross. He installed post-graduate training at City Hospital for select top graduates. In 1851, he married charming Francis (Fanny) Crutcher of Nashville, and moved there to practice and manage the Crutcher farm. There he indulged a lifelong love of the outdoors, plus hunting and smoking game. In 1854 the family returned to Louisville, where Yandell established a free clinic and resumed advocacy for post-graduate training. However, outbreak of civil war uprooted the family. David, his brother, and father, volunteered in the Confederate Medical Corps. David rose in rank to Medical Director of the western Confederacy. His war experience enhanced his insights, especially recognition of harm caused by the poor training of most physicians.

University of Louisville Years

Returning to Louisville after the war, Yandell's skills, drive, and dignified charm rapidly rebuilt his practice and community standing. He resumed University teaching and his efforts to improve education, and he was appointed Professor of Surgery in 1867. He established a dispensary clinic at the University. His eloquent lectures, respect for patient dignity, practical principles and clinical skills drew many students to the University. Competing for enrollment, rival

Louisville Medical Schools (Kentucky School of Medicine and Louisville Medical College) made him a target of fierce criticism. Despite these attacks, his local and national status grew.

Medical Society Activities and Leadership

Yandell was a founding member of the KMA. Local and state medical societies and journals were then the principal source of postgraduate education. Yandell established and edited a journal, *The American Practitioner*, and his writings were widely praised. He led meetings of the Louisville College of Physicians and Surgeons, then the foremost local society. He founded the Louisville Surgical Society, which continues to this day. His productivity and reputation led to presidencies of both the American Medical Association and American Surgical Association, plus many international honors. Throughout this, he maintained an active practice, a respected teaching role, a rewarding family life, and a prominent civic role.

David Yandell died in 1898, leaving an inspiring legacy of superior patient care, education progress, compassion for the poor, and professional leadership. In his honor, the Kentucky Medical Association dedicates the 2022 Annual Meeting and activities of the year.