Remembering Dr. Morton on the sesquicentennial of his death

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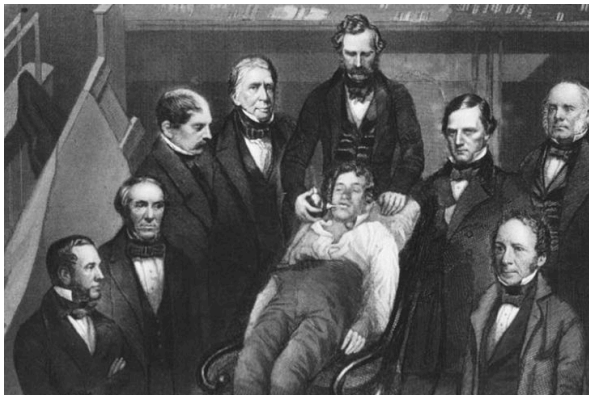
Abstract

On July 15th, 1868, the world lost a legendary medical personality.

William Thomas Green Morton, MD, is considered the pioneer of painless surgery. At that time Dr. Morton was only 48 years old.

He was an American dentist who first publicly demonstrated the use of inhaled ether as a surgical anesthetic. Morton is best remembered for administering ether to a patient undergoing successful surgery at the Massachusetts General Hospital on October 16th 1846. Morton perhaps was not the "inventor" but certainly the "revealer" of inhalational anesthesia.

The invention of surgical anesthesia was the first major contribution that American medical science made to the world and it is probably still the greatest of America's many medica discoveries. Surgical anesthesia and analgesia have become an accepted standard in surgical and medical care.



Ether's day. On October 16°, 1846, 27-year-old William Thomas Green Morton gave the first public display of ether use as John Collins operated on the neck of Edward Gilbert Abbott, age 20. Warren exclaimed to the surgery's audience, "Gentlemen, this is no humbug."

References

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I strongly believe the history of medicine is an important subject for all medical students to study. Physicians should understand the background of medicine, where our current knowledge comes from, and why it is so important to be evidenced based when choosing treatments: this history of wrong choices is staggering. Doctors were respected members of society who balanced biology and human compassion with remarkable abilities to help people from all walks of life. If you had a passion for applying science to helping others, there was nothing else you should consider doing. I didn't, and jumped right into a career as a physician.

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