

A Generous Exchange “From Senior, to Junior”: Remembering Dr. Charles Drake

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The teacher-student relationship will always remain important. Here we present a correspondence that took place on paper via “snail mail”, before the widespread adoption of electronic communication. It is an example of extraordinary generosity from a senior and world renowned neurosurgeon to a junior and unknown colleague in a far off land.

In 1992, I (KY) was a junior resident training in neurosurgery in Turkey and part of a team that operated on a patient with a

distal posterior cerebral artery (PCA) aneurysm. I was told by my chief that the aneurysm’s location was rare, that it might merit a case report in a neurosurgical journal. At that time, our university did not have the internet; it was before the “information revolution”. I did a background search of distal PCA aneurysms from paper copies of books and journals, and while I found six similar cases in the literature none were authored by Professor Charles G. Drake, who I knew was the

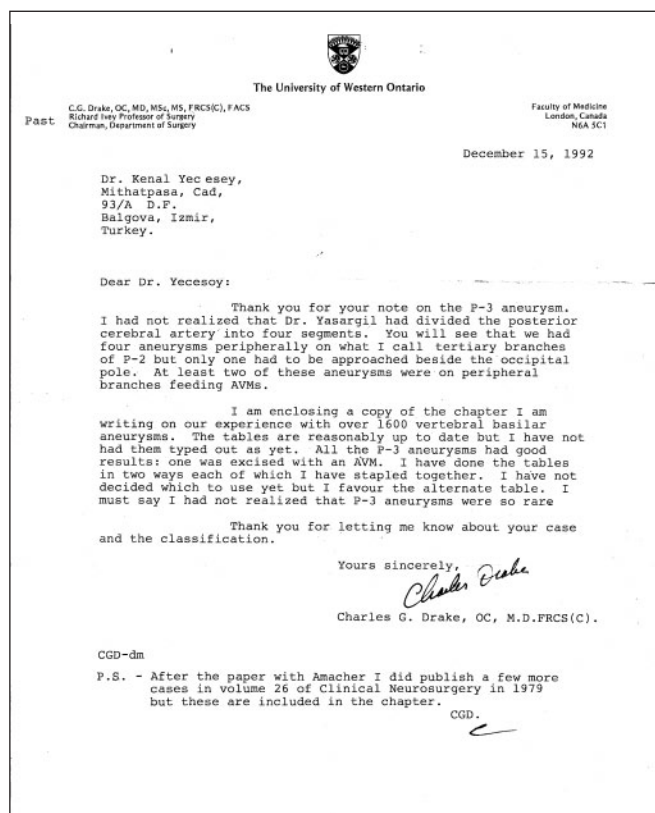


Figure 1: The letter from senior to junior.

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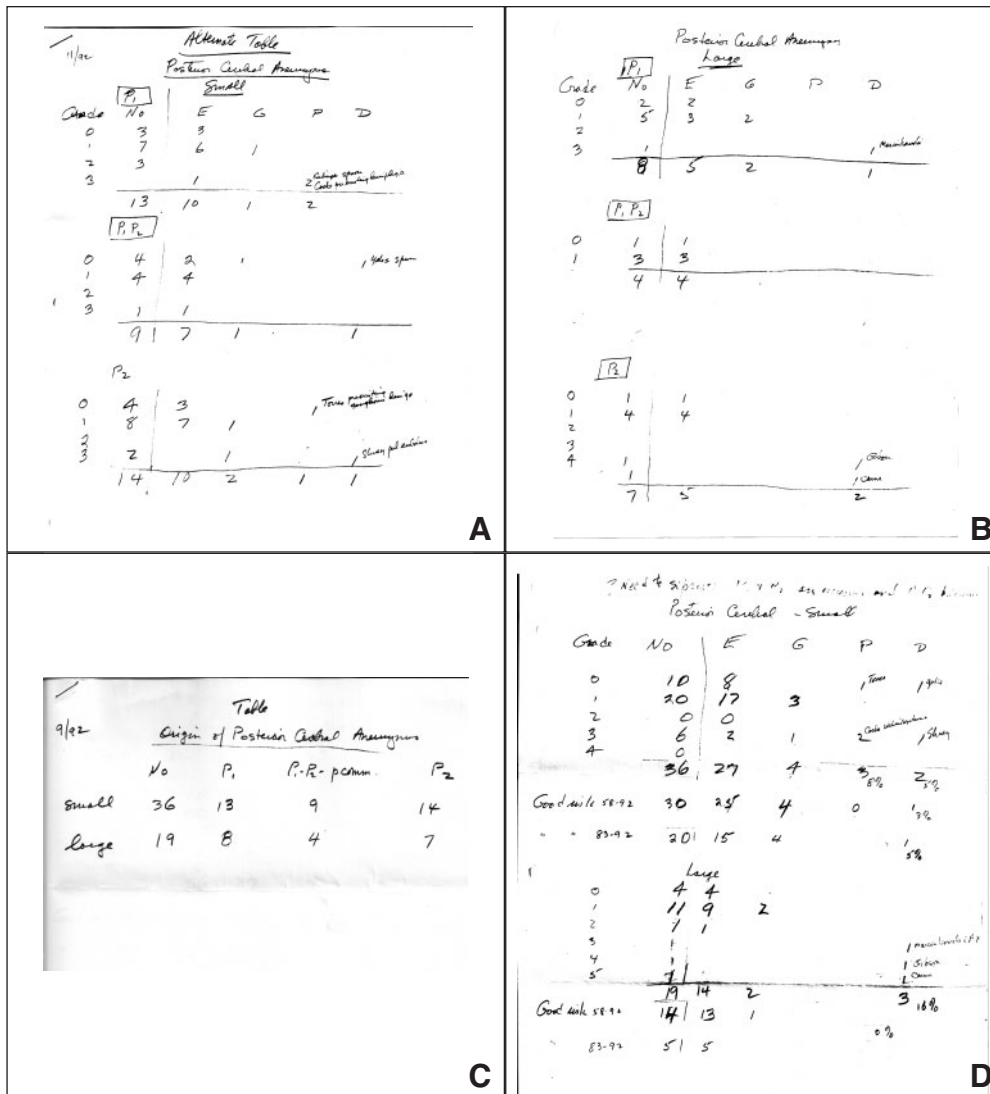


Figure 2: Tables in Dr. Drake's handwriting.

world pioneer of posterior circulation aneurysm surgery. Confused, I gathered the courage to send him a letter by "snail mail" (regular mail). Several weeks later I received a letter in return from the Professor himself! (Figure 1) Dr. Drake confirmed that distal PCA aneurysms are indeed rare and that, in over 1600 vertebrobasilar aneurysms he had treated, only four were in the same location as was found in our patient. He also sent his still to be published chapter entitled "Aneurysms of the posterior cerebral artery"¹ that included handwritten tables (example, Figure 2). In his notes he divided the PCA aneurysms into P1, P1/2 and P2 segment locations.

The material he sent was very useful in writing our paper which was published in the Turkish Neurosurgery Journal².

Now a senior neurosurgeon myself, I can truly appreciate the meaning of that letter. A world leader in neurosurgery, not only answering the letter of a very junior colleague from across the world, but also sending him his unpublished chapter and

precious data in his own handwriting, deeply influenced my attitude towards teaching. This act of generosity has guided my teaching like a beacon.

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