Spencer Bidwell King III, MD

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On September 16, 1977, Andreas Gruentzig dilated a coronary lesion using a crude balloon technique which he termed "coronary transluminal angioplasty."¹ Despite initial skepticism, his procedure revolutionized cardiology. Following Gruentzig's tragic death in 1985, Spencer King was selected to be his successor at Emory University. Since then, King has become a world leader who has shepherded the development of interventional cardiology.²

Spencer Bidwell King III was born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1937. His mother was a violinist and teacher who had trained at the New England Conservatory of Music and the Julliard School. His father was a professor of history and political science in North Carolina; however, the family settled in Macon, Georgia in 1946 when his father was appointed Chairman of the History Department at Mercer University. He had immense respect for his parents, and his upbringing was liberal, with an emphasis on tolerance and the importance of race relations. Living just blocks from Mercer University, a young King was able to walk to grade school, high school, and college. In high school, King was a fine student and track athlete. He studied photographs of an Olympic discus record holder to learn the technique, and he finished third in the state meet. At Mercer University, he majored in chemistry and also worked as a disc jockey whose opening line was, "This is the red-headed ranch hand coming to you from WBML high above Mulberry Street Lane in beautiful downtown Macon."²

In 1959, he entered the Medical College of Georgia on a state scholarship. In medical school, he was influenced by William F. Hamilton, Professor and Chair of Physiology, who was a pioneer in circulatory physiology. A rotating internship at Walter Reed Army Hospital followed; his patients included prominent military leaders and a past president. Early in his internship year in 1963, he married the vivacious Gail Hayes from Savannah whom he had met while she was a nursing student at the Medical College of Georgia. After serving a year in Hawaii, he was sent to Vietnam where he commanded a medical unit in the dangerous district of Cu Chi. He received the Bronze Star for his military deeds.

After his military obligation, he returned to Georgia in 1966. By then, King had decided on a cardiology career, and he came to Emory University where Drs. R. Bruce Logue, J. Willis Hurst, and Robert Franch became important mentors. A year in the cardiac catheterization lab was primarily devoted to pediatric cases, so he sought further experience in coronary angiography in Denver, Colorado working with Fred Schoonmaker. At that time,

the Sones Technique, requiring a brachial artery cutdown and catheter exchanges, was the usual left heart and coronary approach. Schoonmaker and King developed a multipurpose single femoral catheter approach that they published in *Circulation*.³ It became widely adopted as an easier technique for coronary angiography. In 1971, Drs. Logue and Hurst invited King to return to Emory to develop the first catheterization laboratory to perform coronary arteriography in Emory Hospital. By 1974, he was in charge of a multi-laboratory suite; cardiac bypass surgery was underway, and collaborative studies were soon started with surgery and nuclear medicine.

King met Andreas Gruentzig in 1976 at the American Heart Association (AHA) meeting in Miami Beach and later invited him to speak to the South Atlantic Cardiovascular Society in 1978. In 1980, Gruentzig confided to King that he wished to leave Zurich to come to the United States to increase his study population. With the help of J. Willis Hurst, King convinced him to come to Emory in 1980. Over the next 5 years, Gruentzig and King worked closely together, along with John Douglas, refining angioplasty, establishing a large database, publishing multi-center clinical trials, and mounting courses that included live televised case demonstrations in front of large audiences. Emory soon became regarded as the world's center of angioplasty.

When Gruentzig was killed in an airplane crash in 1985 at the age of 46, King was asked by Dr. Hurst to assume directorship of the Andreas Gruentzig Cardiovascular Center. Since gathering the reins, King has been principle investigator of several national and international trials, including the first NIH-sponsored trial that compared angioplasty with bypass surgery (KING; 1994). His group has trained scores of interventional cardiologists in clinical methods and in translational and clinical research. King and Douglas were the first in the United States to insert a clinical stent.

King has taught interventional techniques and delivered major lectures throughout the world, published over 500 papers, authored or edited 10 books, including *Interventional Cardiology* and *Hurst's—The Heart*, and he is on the editorial board of *Circulation*, the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, *Clinical Cardiology*, and other journals.⁵ King has become accepted as the natural successor to Andreas Gruentzig, and his many awards include the Ethica award of the European Society of Cardiology, the Osler award of the University of Miami, the Drake award of the Northern New England Chapter of the AHA, the Jessie Edwards award of the University of Minnesota,

Figure 1. Spencer B. King III: May 12, 1937–.

Master of the American College of Cardiology, Fellow of the European Society of Cardiology, Honorary Fellow of the Japanese Circulation Society, and an honorary degree from Patil University, India. He was selected to be a distinguished alumnus of Mercer University and the Medical College of Georgia.

In 1998–1999, King served as president of the American College of Cardiology (ACC). He proved to be a fine president with drive and credibility who strengthened the College in the areas of governmental advocacy, reimbursement, guidelines, education, and sub-specialization. Throughout the last 10 years, he has played a key role in the development of the field of interventional cardiology with a defined

training program and certifying examination. He advocated for a formal specialty of interventional cardiology, which was approved by the Accrediting Council on Graduate Medical Education, and he served as chair of the cardiovascular subspecialty board of interventional cardiology of the American Board of Internal Medicine (1997–2007) and also as a member of its cardiovascular board (1998–2004). In an interview with William Roberts in 1999, he commented: “As the field becomes more and more complex, it will ultimately be best served by people concentrating on interventional cardiology as their main activity, and that will mean fewer cardiologists doing angioplasty.”

In order to focus more on his national and international responsibilities, King became an Emeritus Professor at Emory in 2000 and joined the Fuqua Heart Center of Atlanta at Piedmont Hospital, where he was appointed to the J. B. and Dottie Fuqua Chair of Interventional Cardiology. There he has continued his interventional research, especially in the area of restenosis, and his commitment to the ACC by serving on task forces, writing editorials and position papers, and becoming Editor-in-Chief of their new journal *JACC: Cardiovascular Interventions*. He is co-director of a collaborative effort of Atlanta metropolitan hospitals and the Emergency Medical Services—the Atlanta T.I.M.E. project—to improve triage and early intervention in acute myocardial infarction. Currently, he is Chairman of the New York State Cardiac Advisory Board. This board oversees cardiac services and the New York State database which is the most comprehensive in the nation.

As a thoughtful senior statesman, King is appreciated for his objectivity in the interpretation of clinical studies. His willingness to travel worldwide as a teacher and advisor and his collaborative efforts with multiple American and international societies, have served cardiology well. The vigorous efforts of Dr. King and others have ensured that the rapid growth of this new field has followed in the vision of Andreas Gruentzig, the pioneer of angioplasty.

References

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