

Partnership for Excellence: Medicine at the University of Toronto and Academic Hospitals by Edward Shorter

Margaret Cocks, MD., Ph.D.

Volume 107, numéro 2, fall 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050645ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050645ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Cocks, M. (2015). Compte rendu de [*Partnership for Excellence: Medicine at the University of Toronto and Academic Hospitals* by Edward Shorter]. *Ontario History*, 107(2), 278–279. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050645ar>

food production, nutrition, and consumption. Also, it destabilized pre-war concepts of gender, citizenship, and nation and contributed to the pursuit of postwar affluence and plenty by government intervention in the economy and society. I am sure Tilly would agree! For my part, I commend this study for

its innovative insights, its allusion to the well referenced and footnoted scholarship of others on food history and social history, and its supportive images.

Brian Osborne,
Professor Emeritus, Queen's University

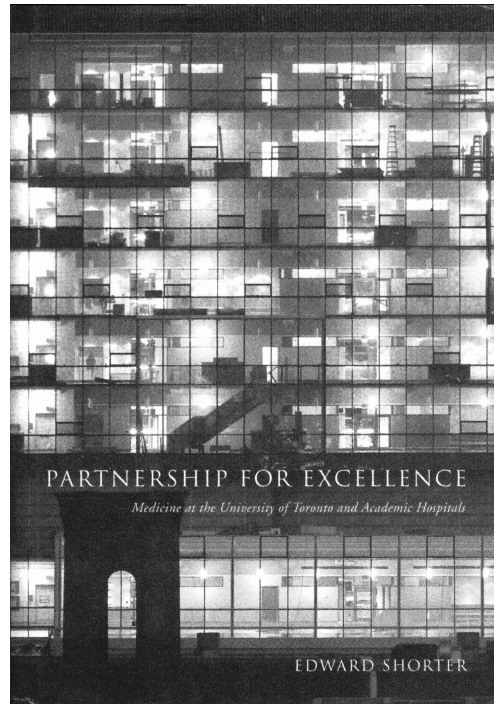
Partnership for Excellence Medicine at the University of Toronto and Academic Hospitals

By Edward Shorter

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 992 pages including appendices. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-44264-595-0. \$65.00 eBook. ISBN 978-1-44266-404-3. www.utppublishing.com)

In his epic tome, *Partnership for Excellence: Medicine at the University of Toronto and Academic Hospitals*, Edward Shorter tackles a daunting topic—the history of the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine, from its humble beginnings as a provincial medical school for rural farm boys in the late nineteenth century to its gradual emergence as an internationally-renowned research powerhouse. Known for his ability to catalogue the histories of complex medical problems, Shorter yet again is instrumental in producing an encyclopedic text that skillfully tells a complicated story. It would not be stretch to call his 750-page book a definitive history.

Two intertwined themes play a central role in Shorter's history. First, Toronto's gradual transition from a primarily teaching-based institution to a research-driven behemoth, as illustrated by a slew of discoveries, such as insulin and stem cells, that are used as sign-posts to guide the institution's rise. The second theme made this first transition possible because it explores the institution's slow abandonment of the shackles of British gentlemanly science for the more research-



centered approach of American medicine. In order to prevail in the world of research, Toronto would need to adopt a research-focused agenda rooted in the American way of doing science. For this, schools south of the border, notably Johns Hopkins and its emphasis on laboratory science, would be the model.

Shorter suggests that the backdrop to these major themes and a substantial contributor to the University of Toronto's success in the medical world was the institution's "very intimate" relationships with the city's

eight distinct teaching hospitals (7). This is a unique situation not seen elsewhere in North America and is justly highlighted by Shorter. It is the sense of collegiality among what could have been a disparate collection of individual institutions that allowed the University to forge ahead. By cross-appointing academic physicians and scientists at each hospital to university departments and involving each hospital in student teaching, the University formed a nexus of medical professionals that could work together to increase the institution's reputation in research and beyond.

The real heart of Shorter's work is in his description of the myriad leaders who underpinned Toronto's success. He presents a roll call of men (and a few women) who have influenced the faculty and "helped outfit the scientists with lab space and funds and, more importantly, inculcated a general research culture in the faculty and the hospitals" (5). Shorter's two main themes are again highlighted in these biographical vignettes—"world-changing research" was the attractive force for institution-changing leaders (8).

The book is divided into 30 chapters each of which delves more deeply into the many departments that have evolved at Toronto, from anesthesia to molecular medicine. Special attention is given to the crown jewels of the institution—the departments of surgery and medicine. There are chapters dedicated to new initiatives as well, including diversity in medicine, the study of medical education and medical student life. These

latter reviews, though, are at times superficial when compared to Shorter's extensive analysis of surgery and medicine.

While Shorter contends that his work is not a hagiography in the strictest sense, the text does at times routinely acclaim its main characters with little critique or broader contextualization of their actions. This may in part be a function of the administrative archives used as primary sources for the text. Furthermore, one should hesitate at Shorter's rather narrow definition of success as being primarily concerned with research accomplishments to the neglect of other possible markers, such as patient care or community outreach.

Overall, Shorter's tone is not overly academic, with generous insertions of witty musings and germane anecdotes, making the book easily accessible. Shorter does a masterful job at integrating a mountain of data, although there are moments when historical trajectories are difficult to follow as he jumps backward and forward in time to illustrate events, especially in introductory chapters such as "Big Deeds." Nonetheless, a thorough treatment of the subject with meticulous analysis of available archives make the book a true reference text and exceptional resource for historians, scholars, students and alumni interested in the history of Canadian medicine.

Margaret Cocks, MD, Ph.D.
Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions