

HISTORY OF RECURRENT LARYNGEAL NERVE RESEARCH

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Background/Purpose: The history of thyroid surgery demonstrates the evolution of modern surgical techniques.

Methods: Early development of thyroid surgery in Europe came from the School of Salerno, Italy, in the 12 - 13centuries. It includes using of a hot iron, setons, ligatures with often patients death. The anatomy of the normal thyroid gland was understood through the work of Leonardo da Vinci.

Results: The recurrent laryngeal nerve (RLN) was found as a branch of the vagus nerve witch descends into the thorax before rising up to reach the neck. Galen at first described the RLN in detail during the second century. He recognized in studies on the living pig that “if one compresses the nerve with the fingers or a ligature or ...cuts the nerve, the pig stopped squealing”. Arabic medical literature also contains references to the RLN (Albucassis, 1000 A.D.). During the Renaissance, in 1503, Leonardo Da Vinci drew the first anatomical representation of the RLN. Vesalius, in 1543, produced excellent anatomical drawings of the RLN. J. Berry described the thyroid suspending ligament. G. W. Crile called the area near the nerve “no man’s land.” In 1904, A.A. Bobrov and his pupil A.A. Lezhnev reported on 106 thyroid operations under RLN visual control. Since 1938, F. H. Lahey and his staff have performed every thyroidectomies with RLN dissection and decreased the rate of it injuries to 0.3%.

Discussion & Conclusion: A.A. Bobrov, Lahey’s works with its emphasis on anatomy set the course and direction for modern thyroid surgery.