

## The great surgeon Jean-Louis Faure (1863-1944) and his contribution in the treatment of uterine cancer

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### Summary

At the beginning of the 20th century, Professor Jean-Louis Faure, one of the leading surgeons of the innovative Parisian Medical School, published an exhaustive work on uterine cancer. He was the first to perform in France the procedure of total abdominal hysterectomy by median section of the uterus contributing to the evolution of cancer surgery.

**Key words:** Faure, gynecologic oncology, hysterectomy, surgery



*Professeur Jean-Louis Faure*

**The eminent cancer surgeon  
Jean-Louis Faure.**

### Introduction

At the beginning of the 19th century the first hysterectomy attempts ended in bloody failures and the practice was abandoned. In about 1875-1880, the German surgeon Kaltembach reattempts abdominal hysterectomy with operative mortality of around 67%. Therefore, surgeons continued to perform vaginal hysterectomy with low operative mortality (5-10%), but still without chances of recovery.

Thanks to asepsis, we return to abdominal hysterectomy with the Viennese Ernst Wertheim (1864-1920) who proposed in 1900 a radical therapy of uterine cancer. However, between 1896 and 1905, he loses 20 (22%) of his 90 operated patients. Generally, 466 hysterectomies in total were identified in 1907 by Sobre-Casas and performed since 1898 by 27 surgeons, the operative mortality rate being 25.1% (117 deaths) [1].

The surgical technique of hysterectomy was perfected in 1896, thanks to the French surgeons Faure, Terrier, Poirier and Quénu. Actually, the removal of the uterus, called "radical" or "total", with extirpation of neoplastic lesions in the pelvic tissues and partial resection of the vagina increased the survival rates. In 1899, during the 2nd Congress of the International Society of Surgery, some surgeons claimed cure rates about 20 to 40% and absence of recurrence beyond 5 years [2].

### Faure's Life - Studies - Career

Jean-Louis Faure was born on October 27, 1863 in Sainte-Foy-la Grande, a small town near Bergerac in Gironde, France, which was the little homeland of the eminent physicians Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), Paul Reclus (1847-1914) and Samuel Pozzi (1848-1918). He died on October 27, 1944 in Saint Émilion. His maternal uncle Paul Reclus was professor of surgery in Paris. Faure began his studies in the Protestant College of Sainte-Foy and graduated in the Lyceum Louis-le-Grand in Paris. In 1884, he enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine (Photo). In 1886, he becomes extern in the department of Alexis Legroux (1839-1894), professor of pathology in the Laennec Hospital and in 1887-1890 he becomes an intern. On July 5, 1888, Faure married Madeleine Bourgeois. From this marriage four children were born.

In 1889-91, he was appointed assistant in anatomy and later on lecturer. In 1895, he became hospital physician. In 1898, he obtained the title of associate professor of surgery. In 1899-1904, he was appointed lecturer of the surgical clinic at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital. In 1918, he was designated lecturer of clinical gynecology and in 1919 he replaced the late professor Samuel Pozzi in the chair of clinical gynecology at Broca Hospital. In 1934, he became emeritus professor of surgery.

In 1924, Faure received the insignia of Commander of the Legion of Honor and became member of the French Academy of Medicine. One year later he was elected president of the Surgical Society [3].

### Faure's scientific work

Jean-Louis Faure was one of the greatest surgeons of his time. Although he was specialized in gynecology, he presented an interesting work on cancer and left his mark in many surgical techniques such as the extirpation of the parotid glands and the drainage of peritonitis [3].

His name is related to: 1) Faure's needle: needle of round point handle, for ligation of the hypogastric artery. 2) Faure's needle with a lever: variety of lateral Reverdin needle with lever. 3) Faure's operation: surgical technique of subtotal abdominal hysterectomy by uterine hemisection. 4) Faure's clamp: long curved hemostatic forceps. 5) Faure's extra-condylar veins [4]. 6)

Faure's and Ionesco vestibule (pre-vestibular funnel): inconstant prolongation of the vestibule of the back cavity of the omentum, to the right of the opening into lesser sac of peritoneum [5].

His publications include: his doctoral thesis entitled 'The suspensory apparatus of the liver (L'appareil suspenseur du foie), Hepatoptosis and hepatopepy (L'hépatoptose et l'hépatopéxie) published in 1892, Surgery of the Uterine adnexa (Chirurgie des annexes de l'utérus) printed in 1902, Clinical lessons and operative techniques (Leçons de clinique et de techniques opératoires), his famous book Hysterectomy (L'hystérectomie) published in 1906 and Treatise on medical and surgical gynecology (Traité de gynécologie médico-chirurgicale) appeared in 1911 [6].

### His work on oncology

In 1896, Faure practiced the first successful hysterectomy in a cancer patient. It was the first operation of its kind performed in France.

In his book entitled *Chirurgie des annexes de l'utérus*, Faure describes the procedure of total abdominal hysterectomy by median section of the uterus. He points that it is an extremely simple procedure without any risk of damaging the ureter. The surgeon can reverse the uterus giving in the bottom of the pelvis space to maneuver and to reach the adnexa below by taking them off upwards, both right and left. According to Faure, this method collects all the facilities and is the ideal of operative simplicity.

Faure actually improved this surgical technique so that in 1920 he achieved long-term survival in 60% of the cases. He also claimed that hysterectomy was the treatment of choice in cancer of the cervix when the uterus was still mobile [7].

In 1932, he stated that he had successfully removed uterine cancer in 86% of the cases. However, these results involved mainly early-stage uterine cancers.

Moreover, to relieve the suffering of his patients professor Faure in 1891 and professor Mathieu Jaboulay in 1901 used to practice section of the spinal nerves, in order to cut off the sources of pain. These caused such physiological alterations though, that they had to abandon this method [8].

Faure was also involved in the 19th century's debat-

ing issue of cancer contagiousness. He and other great oncologists of his time like Roussy and Delbet did not attach the least importance on this belief, rejecting that theory [8].

### Conclusion

Professor Faure revolutionized the practice of hysterectomy opening new horizons of research in cancer surgery. In fact, it was not until the aftermath of the Second World War when the modern fight against cancer begins with the discovery of new chemotherapeutic agents.

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