

# John Murphy: Surgeon Par Excellence...

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## Abstract

John Murphy (1857-1916) was described as a ‘**Surgical Genius**’. He has made numerous contributions to the field of Surgery, including the sign for diagnosis of acute cholecystitis and his advocacy for early intervention in appendicitis. He started the publication - Surgery Clinics, now known as the Surgical Clinics of North America. He was truly a surgeon par excellence.

**Keywords:** Murphy, Cholecystitis, Appendicitis, Punch, Clinics

## Introduction

John Benjamin Murphy was born in Wisconsin on 21st December 1857. He completed his studies from Appleton High School in 1876 and Rush Medical School in 1879. He then worked as an intern at the Cook County Hospital (Illinois) [1]. William Mayo has truly described him as ‘*The Surgical Genius of our Generation*’ [2].

## Contributions to Surgery

### **Murphy’s Sign (1903)**

Elicited in patients with acute cholecystitis. The patient is instructed to take a deep breath, while the examiner palpates the right subcostal area. If the patient experiences pain as the inflamed gallbladder comes into contact with the examiner’s hand, Murphy’s sign is positive. There is an inspiratory arrest, described as a ‘Shutting off of the Inspiration’. [3,4]

### **Sonographic Murphy’s Sign**

Similar to the clinical sign, but the positive response is elicited by palpation using an ultrasound transducer [5].

Advocated *early surgery for treatment of appendicitis* (1889) [6].

### **Murphy’s Button (1892)**

Mechanical device that allowed approximation of hollow viscera without sutures [7].

*End-to-end anastomosis of vessels* (1897) [8].

### **Murphy’s Punch (1884)**

Pain is elicited by percussion over the costovertebral angle (between 12<sup>th</sup> rib and spine) in cases of perinephric abscess, pyelonephritis. This was again described by Pasternacki in 1888 [1].

### **Murphy’s Sign for Lunate Dislocation**

After the patient is instructed to make a fist, the contour of the metacarpophalangeal joint is assessed. If the third metacarpal is in level with second and fourth metacarpal, lunate dislocation is suspected.

### **Murphy’s Drip**

Rectal infusion apparatus to administer the medical procedure of proctoclysis for treatment of peritonitis [9].

### **Murphy Triad**

Abdominal pain, vomiting and fever, seen in appendicitis [10].

### **Murphy’s Chamber**

Prevents air from entering the bloodstream and allows an estimation of flow rate.

### **Described Therapeutic Pneumothorax**

Treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis with injection of nitrogen into the pleural cavity to compress the lung [1].

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Pioneered the *use of Local Anaesthesia in Surgery of Lung* [1].

Studied *Surgery of Spinal Cord and the Peripheral Nerves* [11].

Conducted *Clinics in Surgery* at the Mercy Hospital in Chicago

Started the publication-*The Surgical Clinics of John B Murphy*, at Mercy Hospital, Chicago, now named as "*The Surgical Clinics of North America*" [1].

Murphy was awarded *Laetare Medal* by the University of Notre Dame in 1902 and the *Doctor of Science* by University of Sheffield, England in 1908. He was elected President of the Chicago Medical Society and the American Medical Association.

He died on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1916, in Michigan of aortitis after suffering from angina [11]. A public elementary school named in his honour was constructed in Chicago in 1924. John Murphy was truly a surgeon par excellence.

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