1968—Fifty years on....

As a senior member of the surgical community here at Jefferson, I have immense faith in our future. It is worth underscoring the famous quote of George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Events this year have prompted me to recall the crucial events of my teenage years; specifically the year 1968. Three sources have served to underscore my memories: a CNN special, the Jan/Feb issue of Smithsonian entitled “The Year that Shattered America,” and an exhibit at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, MN. Seismic events occurred in 1968. (1) in January, the Tet offensive, (2) in March, President Johnson announced he would not run for reelection, (3) on April 4, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, (4) on June 4, Robert F. Kennedy was murdered in Los Angeles; (5) in August, there was mayhem at the Democratic National Committee in Chicago, and (6) the year ended in December with the historic Apollo 8 mission, the first manned spacecraft to orbit the moon. Movements such as civil rights, human rights and youth culture “exploded with force in 1968.” Rock and roll music was there, on the airwaves, and on LPs; annotating the journey.

In speaking to my two sons and our Jefferson medical students, graduate students and residents, I have an eerie sense of deja-vu in 2018, as I see parallels between the two years, separated by 50 trips around the sun. The news cycles are filled with stories of political turmoil, human rights violations, civil disorder, and unending wars accompanied by tensions (military, economic and trade) between the world’s superpowers. Many young adults are now worried, anxious, threatened and concerned – as were we in 1968.

The year 2018 will pass. We here at Jefferson will continue to do wonderful, amazing things for the good (and health) of our patients. Our clinical trials will continue to be successful and important. Our Department of Surgery will continue to educate, operate with great skill, innovate and do wonderful, amazing things for the good (and health) of our patients. The year 2018 will pass. We here at Jefferson will continue to do wonderful, amazing things for the good (and health) of our patients.

Department of Surgery Launches Opioid Reduction Initiative

Fourth year general surgery resident Megan Lundgren, MD, and a team of researchers led by Scott Cowan, MD, FACS, Vice Chair for Quality for the Department of Surgery, initiated a project aimed at examining Jefferson’s opioid prescribing practices in the perioperative period. The team surveyed more than 400 patients who had undergone general surgery procedures at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. After identifying how many opioids each had been prescribed, they interviewed patients to understand how many they actually took, how many pills were left over and how the leftover pills were being stored and/or disposed of.

“The results of that initial process revealed that about 65 percent of the prescribed pills were unused, making them vulnerable to diversion and abuse,” Dr. Lundgren says. “When we determined why patients didn’t take all of their pills, we found that many patients did not like the side effects. Also, they simply didn’t need the opioids, as their pain was well controlled with non-opioid alternatives to control pain.

The Toolkit promotes a pain management spectrum that supports the use of acetaminophen, NSAIDs and Gabapentin as first and second line options. Oral opioids and IV opioids are positioned as last-resort options, with specific dosing instructions for each type of procedure.

“Studies have shown that about 7 percent of patients are still taking opioids three months after even minor surgeries,” Dr. Cowan says. “In addition to preventing diversion of these drugs, we want to help reduce the potential for chronic use.”

The Toolkit was introduced to the Department of Surgery by Dr. Lundgren at a recent mini-Grand Rounds presentation and is currently available on the Jefferson Intranet.