

American Medical Association Meets in Washington

On this page are reported some of the more important and interesting papers presented by physicians from all parts of the country at the meeting of the American Medical Association in Washington, May 16 to 20, 1927.

Most Doctors in U. S.

The United States has more doctors than any other country, with 133 physicians to every 100,000 persons, Dr. Arthur Dean Bevan, of Chicago, told his colleagues. Reports from all fields of medical activity were presented to the House of Delegates of the Association today prior to the opening of the scientific session later in the week.

Great Britain has 92 physicians per 100,000 people, Dr. Bevan stated, while Germany has only 51. France lags behind with 35.

The increasing demand of people everywhere for periodic physical examinations by their physician is a significant indicator of the trend of public opinion toward preventive medicine, according to Dr. Olin West, of Chicago, secretary of the Association. Eleven state medical associations and 120 county associations have adopted a plan proposed by the Association a year ago whereby cooperation with the Red Cross makes medical relief immediately available in times of disaster, Dr. West reported.

The efforts of the medical profession to abolish quacks and non-medically qualified healers has found expression in a basic science act drafted by the bureau of legal medicine and legislation. Two states, Wisconsin and Connecticut, have passed such laws, it was stated, requiring all those who apply for permission to practice healing the sick to demonstrate their knowledge of fundamental branches of medicine.

Scores Liquor Restriction

Characterizing the statement on the back of the Volstead prescription book as an insult to an honorable profession, Dr. Wendell C. Phillips, retiring president of the American Medical Association, rapped recent restrictions in the use of medicinal liquors.

In his address to the House of Delegates at the opening of the annual meetings of the Association, Dr. Phillips called the attention of the Medical profession to a recent decision of the Supreme Court supporting the action of Congress to secure the enforcement of the Eighteenth

Amendment that "arrogated to itself (Congress) the functions of the medical profession and the pharmacologist."

Medical men feel that there is active danger in legislation designed to regulate the practice of the art of healing which will place the mere opinion of untrained men and women on a par with the findings of impersonal research. Such a condition, he affirmed, whereby instances may arise when the fiat of Congress may be in direct opposition to the trained judgment of a physician, holds a serious threat to public health.

Dr. Phillips exhorted fellow physicians to put up a united front on this important subject. The House of Delegates of the American Medical Association has expressed its disapproval in the past, he said, of those portions of the Volstead Act which interfere with the proper relation between the physician and his patient in prescribing alcohol medicinally.

"Individual opinions may vary; but individual opinions and convictions should not have a place or be given publicly, as representing the majority opinion of the members of the American medical profession in connection with this matter," he declared.

Preventive medicine, not as a matter of sentiment but of sound business, was another measure urged by the medical leader. The public, which really pays the bills, he said, must be convinced that the medical profession is worthy of its trust as the initiators of a policy of disease prevention that will require, if it is to be effective, the expenditure of many millions of dollars.

The medical profession," he stated, "should throw off its mask of reticence and its shrinking attitude toward reasonable publicity concerning health education. Professional policies narrowly conceived can never successfully oppose the rightful interest of the public. It is time to strike the shackles not only from the shrinking attitude of the medical profession toward the public espousal of educational programs but also from its attitude toward the lay press, the radio and great assemblies of truth-seeking people. The physician has no right to conceal from non-medical readers the great body of news of the highest importance which is his to communicate."

Tonsils and Heart Disease

Ways and means of bringing down the toll of heart disease, responsible for one-fifth of all the adult deaths in the United States, held the attention of many specialists at the recent meeting of the American Medical Association.

Dr. Paul B. White, of Boston, stated that relaxation from strain and regular habits of living were of prime importance in the treatment of this disease. Rest was held to be essential for disturbances of the heart associated with goiter. Effective rehabilitation has been accomplished in many moderately severe cases of rheumatic heart disease, according to Dr. L. A. Conner, of New York. The development of special classes of vocational guidance, employment bureaus and convalescent homes were considered as possible means of helping people overcome the handicap of this malady.

Heart disease occurs much less frequently in children who have had their tonsils removed than in those who have not, Dr. A. D. Kaiser, of Rochester, N. Y., reported as his conclusion from a study of 50,000 school children. The results of this investigation show that the child who has had his tonsils removed is less likely to succumb to rheumatism and scarlet fever as well, Dr. Kaiser declared.

More deaths from heart disease is one of the penalties people are paying for the increased span of life achieved in the past thirty years, Dr. Henry Albert, health commissioner of Iowa, declared at the meeting. One hitherto unconsidered reason for the prevalence of heart disease, which outranks all other causes of death in the United States, is the survival of larger numbers of people from the attacks of infectious diseases, he maintained.

Scarlet fever, rheumatic fever and venereal disease have all been brought more or less under control in recent years, but they leave behind them a constitution weakened in various ways. The injury sustained by a person who has had scarlet fever may not be apparent for twenty years, said Dr. Albert, when it may reveal itself as a disease of the heart, liver, or other organs. About 25 per cent. of all deaths from heart disease have their origin in rheumatism and more are being maimed by its effects than there were twenty years ago, he stated.

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Medical Meeting

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The prevalence of these two diseases is practically the same as it has been in the last two decades, but the death rate has been materially reduced. This leaves an increasing proportion of the population in a condition likely to develop heart disease when the "heart disease age" of forty-five plus is attained, Dr. Albert pointed out.

Cough Cause Sought

An attempt has been made to locate the real reason for the chronic cough.

Drs. W. C. Voorsanger and Fred Fireston, of San Francisco, have reported results from a detailed analysis of 200 patients with coughs.

Since a chronic cough is one of the guide posts pointing to tuberculosis, its presence has led to many diagnoses of this disease that recent investigations have shown to be erroneous, Dr. Voorsanger stated. None of the symptoms of his 200 patients were found to be due to active tuberculosis, though in many cases their condition has been attributed to this cause.

Some 37 per cent. of the cases were found to be suffering from infectious bronchitis and asthma following influenza and pneumonia. In 32 per cent. the cause was not determined, while a variety of afflictions of the throat and lungs accounted for coughs of the remainder.

The condition termed "infectious bronchitis and asthma" is so prevalent, Dr. Voorsanger stated, that it has been called "pseudo-tuberculosis." X-rays are the principal aid in distinguishing this disease from real tuberculosis.

Since a certain proportion of the people with undiagnosed coughs may become tuberculous, he added, active T. B. should be forestalled in such cases by correct living and careful treatment.

Broken Bones

"Splint 'em where they lie" is the slogan Dr. Kellogg Speed, of Chicago, says surgeons should adopt. Treatment of fractures should be immediate before the patient reaches the hospital, he told the Association.

X-ray examination of broken bones is imperative both as an aid to diagnosis and from a medicolegal standpoint, he pointed out, because it protects both the patient and the physician with a permanent record of the injury and reveals the type of fracture present.

Modern Babies Better

Is the reign of the flapper figure to be given credit for better babies? Dr. Effa V. Davis, of Chicago, reported to the section on obstetrics of the American Medical Association meeting, that where the physician's advice on diet and exercise used to be received coldly by the prospective mother, it is now welcomed. The vogue of svelte slimness has simplified the problem of the obstetrician considerably, she declared.

Hygienic modern dress has made exercise popular while the trend of modern health habits has made the young mother-to-be understand how she can help control the development of her child to a degree that will make childbirth less difficult with less risk to both herself and her baby.

Dr. Davis maintained that exercise and a balanced ration are essentials to healthy motherhood. Most of the complications of childbirth met with in her long experience, she explained, had occurred in women who gave up exercise without reducing their diet and had therefore given birth to over-sized babies.

In spite of being one of the most progressive countries, the United States still leaves much to hope for with respect to its maternal death rate. Dr. S. Josephine Baker, of Stamford, Conn., pointed out in the same section, that this country has a higher death rate for mothers in childbirth than any other except Chile. The rate is one-third higher than that of England and Wales, and more than twice as great as that of Denmark, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden, she stated.

Germs in Swimming Pools

Was the old swimming hole less of a hazard than the modern sterilized pool? Although strenuous efforts are made toward sterilization of water in swimming pools infections have become so frequent in recent years that almost every family has been brought to grief in one way or another from swimming, Dr. Frederick E. Hasty, of Nashville, Tenn., stated.

The number of bacteria in public pools is often under control, he admitted, but little consideration has been given to the kind of bacteria present.

Guinea pigs inoculated with bacteria recovered from water from pools that had undergone various

processes of sterilization developed practically every bacterial type of infection of the upper respiratory tract. The severity of the guinea pig infections was found to vary in proportion to the severity of the colds prevalent in the neighborhood at that particular time.

"Water gets into the nasal chambers of most swimmers," Dr. Hasty said, "carrying with it the contamination of the pool and at the same time adding to the pool whatever bacteria may be present in the particular swimmer's nose."

"I have observed a number of boys who got sinus infection from one pool as a result of being required to duck their heads." Dr. Hasty asserted. "Without an exception the infections cleared up in the course of a few weeks after leaving off swimming. Persons who have suffered from paranasal sinus infection or nasal obstruction are likely to develop acute attacks following swimming. The high percentage of frontal and ethmoidal sinus infection is due to virulent foreign bacteria reaching the vulnerable part of the nose and to a lowered local and systemic resistance."

Diet Cures Skin Diseases

Those who vainly strive for perfect complexions should take courage. A patient with eczema for thirty-one years at last acquired a healthy skin by observing the proper diet, Dr. Francis Lowell Burnett, of Boston, told members of the Association. Another patient was cured who suffered from psoriasis, a skin disease caused by imperfect assimilation of food, for fifty-two years, he stated.

One of the commonest errors, according to Dr. Burnett, is eating too much and too fast. Too many sweets, fats, and rich food, he added, along with eating between meals, loss of sleep and insufficient exercise are other mistakes that lead to the breakdown of the structure of the skin.

Cures can be made and recurrence prevented when the patient trains himself to recognize the first signs of digestive disorder and follows the prescribed diet, the specialist declared.

Science News-Letter, May 21, 1927

Tobacco stems and waste cuttings make durable paper money, European experimenters report.

Out of the thousands of plants which might be developed as food for man, less than 200 kinds are widely used.