

# Physicians Gather in Atlantic City

Doctors grapple with education, changing morals and Medicare, while baring their own arms to the hypodermic needle.

by Faye Marley

Atlantic City has an unusually germ-free look this week as the hotels prepare to welcome the American Medical Association for its 116th convention. Some 12,000 physicians with their wives, children and guests will arrive June 18 to see the mammoth exhibits and documentary movies, to hear the talks and enjoy the boardwalk and ocean.

**Smaller groups** are already meeting this week. The American Neurological Association began sessions June 12; other ancillary meetings include a pre-convention session on school health and a public conference on medicine and religion.

Dr. John Rock, a well-known Catholic believer in birth control, Father Thomas J. O'Donnell of Hot Springs, N.C., Dr. Harold I. Lief of New Orleans and Dr. Seward Hiltner of Princeton, N.J., will speak on "The Doctor's Dilemma in the World of Changing Morals." Contraception and therapeutic abortion (SN: 6/3) will be among their subjects.

One of the important topics to come up before the AMA's House of Delegates will be educational requirements for doctors. The abandonment of the internship has been proposed in the controversial Millis Report, which was discussed at the AMA clinical meetings in Las Vegas, Nev., last fall. Every physician was urged to study and evaluate the report prior to this convention.

**The report recommends** "that the internship, as a separate and distinct portion of medical education be abandoned, and that the internship and residency years be combined into a single period of graduate medical education called a residency and planned as a unified whole."

Dr. Carroll L. Witten, president of the American Academy of General Practice, says the academy is wholeheartedly behind the report, and plans to take it up in Dallas when its annual meeting is held later this summer.

"We are hoping that the report will be acted upon by the House of Delegates," says Dr. Witten, a member of the AMA House of Delegates. "We plan to bring up portions at the House meetings because we are especially interested in the need for more physicians.

"We are not so interested in the mechanics of change or technical procedure, but I share Dr. Millis's opinion

that there is need for change in the internship and residence programs, and that hospital teaching programs should be improved."

Dr. Witten, who practices medicine in Louisville, Ky., goes on to say that there should be sweeping changes, not only in medical education, but in the way educators approach fields such as those of the family physician. He said the academy requires its GP members to keep up with medical education, and that there should be more emphasis on professional respect.

The lack of reward is partly behind the shortage of family doctors. Dr. Witten believes. The status of the general practitioner should be upgraded. "We feel that we should have the prestige of being made 'diplomates,' just as specialists have."

**Dr. John S. Millis** is a Doctor of Philosophy rather than Medicine. President of Western Reserve University, Cleveland, he was chairman of the Citizens Commission on Graduate Education, commissioned by the AMA.

His report recommends that a commission on graduate medical education be established.

"We believe," Dr. Millis adds, "that organized medicine should assume the responsibility for such a body, and we have therefore proposed that the American Medical Association bear the expense of the operation but without any control over the membership of the commission or any review of its findings and recommendations.

"We envisage a commission made up of the most statesmanlike members of the profession, those most able in and most deeply concerned with graduate education and, in addition, some individuals of recognized standing in the field of higher educations."

**AMA officials** will be surprised if the subject of Medicare is not introduced at the convention. Medicare billing, for example, which most doctors claim entails too much paper work, needs reform. Also, Medicaid, which some New York physicians say is a "mess," will also get a going over.

While the AMA favors direct billing, "physicians should assist many of their elderly patients in coping with Medicare's paper work," officials say.

Many offices do not even offer patients the necessary forms to fill out and

mail to their Medicare office with the required receipted bill.

Dr. Charles L. Hudson, outgoing president of the AMA, said in testimony before the House Ways and Means committee in March, "we still believe Medicare is unwise legislation and is not in the public interest."

Among the scientific sessions, which draw the largest number of physicians and guests, will be one June 19 on the general subject of healing. This is a joint meeting with the sections on general surgery, general practice, military medicine, orthopedic surgery, pathology, and physiology and proctology. Missile wounds, infection problems and other phases of surgical and war wounds will be discussed.

On Tuesday at 2 p.m., the subject is sex, and sections on obstetrics and gynecology will meet with the one on nervous and mental diseases.

Wednesday at 9 a.m. the topic is backache for sections on orthopedic surgery, nervous and mental diseases, physical medicine and urology.

Thursday at 9 a.m. the subject is patient care. Sections on general practice, physical medicine and preventive medicine will join in this discussion.

Sections on allergy, anesthesiology, dermatology, diseases of the chest, gastroenterology, general surgery, internal medicine, laryngology, otology and rhinology, ophthalmology, pediatrics, radiology, urology and preventive medicine are among those scheduled.

It is to these section meetings that doctors from the small towns especially come for help in their particular problems and specialties. The exhibits will be open three days to physicians alone so they can discuss them freely.

One popular session is conducted daily for physicians who never have time for a general check-up. Shirtless doctors can be seen getting electrocardiograms and cholesterol tests, and many is the wife who looks on with a Mona Lisa smile at the wincing of her husband when he gets a needle jabbed into his arm. The tables are turned, and this inevitably is a situation for humor—one of the few funny things at the AMA convention.

Wives and nurses have sessions sponsored by the Woman's Auxiliary, and the medicos themselves exhibit their leisure-time art work.