

MEDICINE

Top Level Medical Care

Protecting the health of a U. S. president calls for top level medical care. The burden of the office and its effect on presidential health was noted early.

By JANE STAFFORD

► PRESIDENT EISENHOWER'S heart attack in September, 1955, brought a team of top-flight doctors to his bedside: Maj. Gen. Howard McC. Snyder, his personal physician; Col. Thomas W. Mattingly, heart specialist, of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D. C.; Col. Byron E. Pollock, chief of cardiology service, Fitzsimons General Hospital, Denver, and Dr. Paul Dudley White of Boston, a civilian and probably America's best-known heart specialist.

What of other Presidents and their doctors? Our first President, George Washington, had six doctors attending him at various times, according to medical records searched by Charles Roos, chief of the document section at the Armed Forces Medical Library in Washington, D. C.

One of them, Dr. James Craik, was not only his personal physician but his life-long friend. The custom of having presidential physicians members of the Armed Forces did not start until much later, but Dr. Craik played a distinguished role in the medical affairs of the Revolutionary Army. And when there was rumor of war with the French he was made Physician General of the Army at Washington's request. He was "attending physician" at Washington's death in 1797.

Pneumonia Hit Washington

The health of our first President must have given his physicians plenty of concern. One of them, Dr. Samuel Bard, is credited with having saved his life early in his first term. He operated on Washington after the inauguration, for a carbuncle of the thigh. Pneumonia set in as a complication.

There were, of course, no sulfa drugs nor penicillin nor other antibiotics in those days. It took our first President 109 days to recover from that first pneumonia attack. The operation and the pneumonia kept Washington under Dr. Bard's immediate care for more than three and a half months.

Saving Washington's life is not Dr. Bard's only claim to fame. He was instrumental in founding the first hospital in New York and took a leading role in establishing New York's first medical college.

Washington had another attack of pneumonia a year later and was never in the best of health afterwards. At the time of this attack, Dr. John Jones made an emer-

gency trip from Philadelphia to New York to care for the President. Dr. Charles McKnight served as consulting physician at that time.

The Washington family continued to have Dr. Jones as physician until his death in 1791. When Washington Custis had measles, however, he was treated by Dr. Adam Kuhn.

At the time of Washington's last illness, Drs. Elisha Cullen Dick and Gustavus Brown were called in consultation with Dr. Craik.

Going down the list of Presidents, Mr. Roos found record of only one physician for John Adams. This was the Dr. Holbrook who was physician to John Adams at his death.

Thomas Jefferson is reported to have known a good deal about medicine himself and to have prescribed for his own household. He did not always agree with medical men.

Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of America's famous early physicians, was a personal friend of Jefferson's and occasionally was

consulted by Jefferson by letter.

One time Jefferson wrote Rush about a chronic diarrhea. Rush replied giving advice about treatment, including a diet. Another time Jefferson wrote Rush that he found it helpful to bathe his legs and feet in cold water every night. Dr. Rush advised against this.

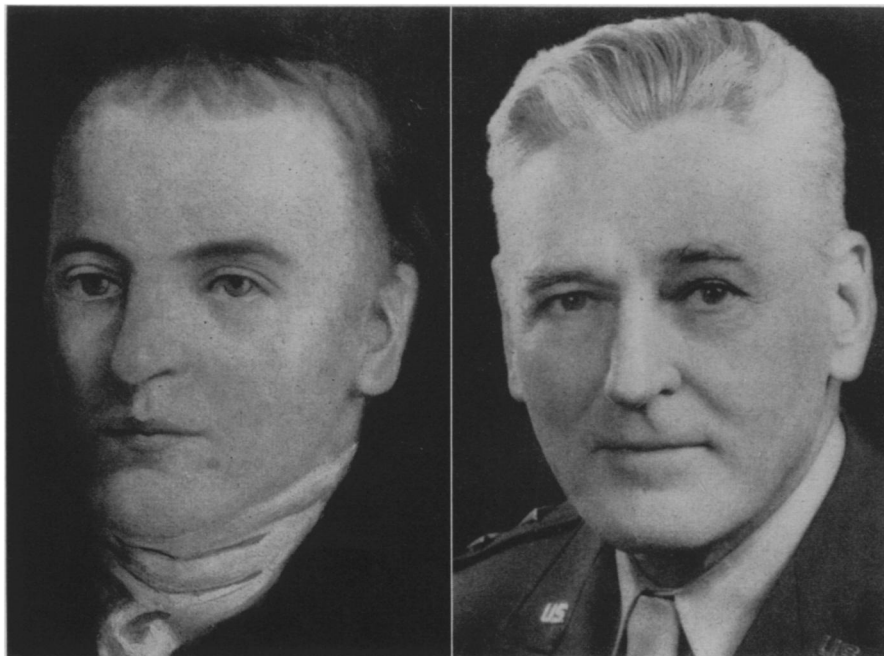
Jefferson, a student of classic literature including the Latin, presumably got the idea from advice on cold baths given by a Roman doctor, Suetonius, who was physician to the Emperor Augustus.

Listed also as a physician to Jefferson is Robley Dunglison. This doctor came from England to the United States at Jefferson's request to serve as professor of medicine at the University of Virginia, which Jefferson founded. He was the attending physician at Jefferson's death.

Burden Noted Long Ago

Dr. Dunglison also served our next President, James Madison. He treated Madison for rheumatism and arthritis. For the last 20 years of Madison's life, however, his regular family physician was his cousin, Dr. Charles Taylor.

The burden of the White House and its effect on a President's health was noted as long ago as the time of our sixth President, John Quincy Adams, who wrote of it and



PRESIDENTIAL PHYSICIANS—George Washington's physician and life-long friend, Dr. James Craik, on the left, and Dwight D. Eisenhower's physician, Major General Howard McCrum Snyder, on the right. These are the official pictures contained in an exhibit in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C.

apparently discussed it with one of his physicians, Dr. Henry Hunt. This charter member of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia repeatedly advised and urged his distinguished patient, as Adams wrote himself, "to spend the summer in the North and vegetate myself in a healthier climate."

If the burden of the office of President has been hard on its incumbents, the burden of caring for the Presidential health may well have been hard on the various medical men who served as physicians to our Presidents.

A statement after the death of President Harrison, first U. S. President to die in office, comments on this as follows:

"The deep political and personal interest dependent on the life of the President imposed on his attending physician a fearful responsibility, of which he felt himself painfully mindful. He speedily sought consultation and was scarcely ever absent from the house more than one hour together."

This statement was signed by five physicians, and the attending physician referred to was Dr. Thomas Miller. One of the five consultants called when President Harrison was stricken with the fatal attack of pneumonia was Dr. James C. Hall.

Dr. Hall must have been a strong-hearted man because he shouldered the responsibility of serving as family physician to some six or eight Presidents and their families.

One authority says he "attended professionally every President from Adams to Lincoln and a greater number of eminent American statesmen and foreign dignitaries residing here during that period than any other physician."

Dr. Hall left no memoirs. He was an early member of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia. Mr. Roos says of him: "A man of independent means, he fell afoul of the Society's controversial regulations by failing to charge fees for his service. Dr. Hall was severely censured by the Society and repented in tears—it is recorded."

Science News Letter, February 11, 1956

GENERAL SCIENCE

Warn About Science Evils

► AN IMPLIED WARNING that America should beware of allowing the Government, in its support of science, to fall unwittingly into evils practiced by Communist governments toward science was sounded by Dr. Raymond T. Birge of the University of California in delivering the retiring presidential address to the American Physical Society meeting in New York.

He warned especially against allowing ourselves to be overtaken by too much planning in basic research. He cited Communist dogma suggesting that all scientific research can and must be planned, and which asserts that teams of researchers of ordinary ability can accomplish more than geniuses.

The physicist quoted passages from a policy speech by Jan Dembowski, president of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which was intended for internal consumption.

Some sample Dembowski quotes, embodying ideas that are the antithesis of Western concepts of science, are:

"We must break away from the idea that scientific work is the result of inspiration, which cannot be planned . . ."

"... it will be necessary . . . to fix norms for the amount of work to be done . . ."

"We cannot depend on geniuses, and with increasing frequency we are trying to solve scientific questions by working on them in teams. Today, a group of people of average ability, such as we can always mobilize, and who have a problem clearly marked out . . . can accomplish more than a single genius working on his own . . ."

Dr. Birge said that although Soviet scientists seem to be the highest paid group in Russia next to the politicians, "their personal freedom, or rather lack of freedom, seems to me to show certain striking similarities to the situation of the slaves of ancient Egypt or Greece."

The scientist also warned that America is likely to suffer, culturally, economically and defense-wise, unless measures are taken to cure the current shortage of scientists.

He predicted the current shortage of physicists is likely to last for another decade. Although every man, woman and child benefits from products that have their origin in the physics laboratory, an appalling percentage of Americans are never even exposed to the physical sciences during their schooling.

Science News Letter, February 11, 1956

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