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THE CHALLENGE OF CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION: AN APPROACH

The Weekly T. E. Schumpert Memorial Hospital
Clinical-Pathology Conference

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When an outbreak of Botulism food poisoning occurred recently in a nearby state the danger to people of this area needed scientific clarification. Where in the program format of a three hundred and twenty-five bed general hospital does one find the time and place for such a topic to be discussed, without creating undue excitement? The Medical Society meets only once a month, and the hospital departmental meetings are filled with business and cases pertaining to a particular department — internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics, psychiatry, general practice or dental surgery. If the Medical Society president calls a special meeting on Botulism, then the news media are likely to learn about it, and the public may feel that there is local danger of Botulism, and we are unjustified in arousing fear prematurely about a medical health problem. Where then can such a topic as Botulism food poisoning be discussed and clarified, as a "routine problem"?

A weekly Clinical-Pathology Conference can determine where to present such an urgent problem, and Botulism *was* discussed recently in detail for forty-five minutes before an audience of sixty-five physicians by a three-man panel at the Schumpert Clinical-Pathology Conference.

Schumpert Memorial Hospital, Shreveport, Louisiana, is operated by the Sisters of Charity of The Incarnate Word. Dr. Hand is Associate Pathologist and Dr. Holoubek, Attending Physician.

History and symptomatology were presented by an internist; bacteriology and specimen care by the consultant in bacteriology, and the Parish Health Officer gave an up-to-the-minute review from the local, state and national Public Health reports. It was learned that no cases of Botulism food poisoning had occurred in Louisiana to that date, and that no cases have been attributed to fish products marketed from the Louisiana area. When this information became known, anxiety abated about Botulism. It is our purpose in this discussion to show that a weekly Clinical-Pathology Conference can be a valuable adjunct to the education and information plans for the staff of a general hospital, and we will outline the history and varied uses of the Conference at the T. E. Schumpert Memorial Hospital.

It became apparent some years ago that the brief period of an hour for the monthly hospital departmental meetings was so consumed by committee reports, autopsy reviews, and general business that it was impossible to present many of the challenging diagnostic problems that we see in a hospital of this size. Too, it was necessary to "break-through" the concept that a Clinical-Pathology Conference is limited to a discussion of autopsies. Pathology is the study of disease in all of its phases, and while autopsy cases may be presented, the real theme of this Clinical-Pathology Conference is the study of

"pathology of the living." Another "break-through" has been the presentation of diagnostic problems from other hospitals; most of our clinicians serve on other hospital staffs, and they will present for discussion an interesting case under their care. Thus, the Schumpert Clinical-Pathology Conference was begun in September, 1959, as an educational supplement to departmental meetings by the Division of Pathology with the Divisions of Medicine, Radiology, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Pediatrics and Psychiatry in cooperation with Hospital Administration. It was made clear at the beginning that this was a scientific meeting, to present challenging diagnostic problems, *without regard to departmental division*, with business limited to brief announcements.

In the four years of its operation the Conference has gone through several phases of development. We have learned better how to recognize and label interesting material. This involves the use of catalogued "Conference Cards" and more photography. Our visual aids such as photomicrography, gross photographs, graph photos, x-ray photos, color slide projector are used often and are generally kept in working order. Avenues of meeting notification to discussants and the staff have been clarified and expedited by planning ahead and mailing cards outlining the programs. The meeting has become accepted we believe, but needs constant attention to the weekly details.

The program chairman in the process of cataloguing the cases and material to be presented in the Conference becomes familiar with the details, and can serve as moderator. We believe that this is a good approach for a weekly meeting, for in the preparation, time is of the essence,

and a second person may not be enthusiastic about the material. On the other hand, the program chairman is counseled by a Conference Advisory Board composed of the heads of the clinical departments of the hospital. To keep the program moving and "alive" the moderator must be familiar with current literature pertinent to the subjects. Portable dictating equipment for summarizing articles in a quiet corner of the library a few days before the meeting helps to get this information on cards, and provides opportunity for the moderator to synthesize the data prior to the meeting. In this way, many articles may be reviewed and a few selected for a dictated summary. Finding the reference may be expedited by applying the journals to the subject; that is, surgery problems are found in surgery journals, and pediatric problems are discussed in pediatric journals, etc. The formal Indices may be used as an adjunct, and not primarily.

The meeting has many applications, all of which are expanding. As improved diagnostic tests are developed in the laboratory they are presented and discussed, and both the laboratory and clinical staff are better oriented. Examples have been reviews of kidney function tests, enzyme studies in heart disease, the clinical and laboratory aspects of hyperparathyroidism, and others. Often a discussant will suggest a new test about which he has learned. The North Louisiana and the Ark-La-Tex area has a moderate incidence of Histoplasmosis and Blastomycosis. The clinical character, regional incidence, and laboratory features of these serious fungus infections were reviewed and illustrated recently. Such are only a few of the topics chosen. Discussions are not limited to any one group. At intervals, the

meeting is devoted to radiologic techniques, presented and conducted by the Division of Radiology. Members of the Medical Division recently presented their latest views on "Pulmonary Function Studies and Inhalational Therapy." Conducted each Friday at noon, except the second Friday devoted to the Surgery Division, it is clear that a large amount of material may be covered each year. The meeting is discontinued during the vacation months of July and August.

Material originally developed for these Conferences often finds its way later to more formal local, state or national meetings. As the Conference has developed we find that discussants are more enthusiastic about presenting cases, and the level of the discussions has improved. Interest and attendance have increased. From a medical staff of two hundred and forty members, attendance has ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five during the first year and has increased to an average of sixty to seventy-five four years later. The Conference gives an awareness of local material and one of the main themes is the analysis of cases from our own hospital. By reviewing the pathology file material and the clinical records we are able to determine the incidence of many disorders in this hospital. For example, the incidence, clinical and laboratory features of Pheochromocytomas of the adrenal gland were discussed. Neonatal pathology and mortality statistics are regularly presented to the Conference, because few members of this audience attend the meetings of the Obstetric staff.

We hear from different specialties such as Plastic Surgery, Dermatology, Neuro-Psychiatry, Neuro-Surgery, Oto-Laryngology and others, providing material not usually pre-

sented in the general staff meetings. Reviews from national meetings are reported to the Conference.

As an adjunct to the curriculum of the School of Medical Technology, the Clinical-Pathology Conference affords the student technologist an opportunity to hear from many different sources about the application of laboratory medicine, and gives the students an increased awareness of their work and position, as well as opportunity to hear discussions of sixty to seventy diagnostic problems throughout the year, as a supplement to their regular curriculum.

In summary, the authors humbly feel that the Clinical-Pathology Conference, if carried out with enthusiasm and planning, has a place in the present-day concept of post-graduate education for the physicians and technical staff of the general hospital. One has only to attempt in the laboratory, library and record room the preparation of such a Conference to see the vast potential of organized post-graduate learning each week on a local basis. It is one attempt at meeting the challenge of continuing education, with the objective of improving the quality of medical care, and realizing that such quality is dependent on the performance of each physician involved.

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