

July 1939

The Social Responsibility of the Medical Profession

John Francis Quinlan

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Quinlan, John Francis (1939) "The Social Responsibility of the Medical Profession," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 7 : No. 3 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol7/iss3/4>

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

By JOHN FRANCIS QUINLAN, M.D.,
San Francisco.*

Any system is judged by its results. Rampant industrialism and socialized medicine are so closely interwoven that the following statistics of the City of London are significant. There, one in every three inhabitants dies in the poor-house; one in every seventy-five deaths is a suicide; one in every twenty babies is illegitimate; one in every eight Londoners is a slum-dweller; twenty thousand basement flats have been declared unfit for human habitation, while fifty thousand immigrants annually move into London from the provinces.

The Present is the natural result of the Past, and the prospect for the Future depends on whether or not we have the courage to learn our lesson from past deficiencies. In no department of human endeavor have its leaders been faithful to their respective trusts—not even in medicine, the custodian of the public's health, mental as well as physical. Had medical leaders been alive to their responsibilities, medicine would not now be contending for its rights. For it must be remembered that there is no privilege without its correlative duty, and that disregard of the latter results automatically in withdrawal of the former.

It is because of medicine's past "scientific detachment" that it

finds itself presently staving-off the compulsion of socialized medicine—the narcotic with which designing politicians more readily ease a suffering and spineless people into the slavery of the totalitarian state, while it reluctantly acquiesces to the lesser evil of health insurance.

Any scheme which dulls in the individual the consciousness of personal responsibility for goods or services rendered them is an evil. Likewise, any set-up in which the servicing personnel is arbitrarily chosen and restricted is inequitable, because it curtails the opportunity whereby the unfavored members of the profession may equitably earn their livelihood. And in a state founded on the principle of the priority of the individual, the public's health, from that viewpoint, is not the immediate concern of the government. The limits of its responsibility rest with the elimination of factors destructive of health in the physical, industrial, and social spheres over which the individual can exert no control—sanitation, equitable capital-labor relations, and the inculcation of Christian ethics as the only basis of social conduct.

With the machine came the mechanistic philosophy of human activity, an activity which became synchronized with the rumble of

* This paper was read before the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, January, 1939.

the machine which, like the savage rhythm of the Bolero, accelerated its tempo until, in an immense temblor, it suddenly ceased on a note of utter exhaustion.

The machine had drawn the people from the country-side and herded them in the slums of the cities. Many leaders, viewing the resultant poverty and squalor, disease and crime, counseled and advocated Birth Control. An enervated and effete society took to it with avidity. But not until we had become predominantly industrialized, did its consequences become manifest in this country. Yet during the past forty years, medicine's leaders have been content to assume an attitude of "scientific detachment" as they observed its "social and biologic results."

Science has had to wait more than three thousand years to discover the import of the curse of Onan: distracted wives, morose and irresponsible husbands, impious children, official chicanery, economic stagnation, and physical and mental disease at a time in life when man should normally expect the well-earned rest from his labors. Incidentally, Cancer is produced in the laboratory by a comparable method and with the drugs and chemicals which are basically related to the ingredients of the sundry pastes, tablets, jellies, and suppositories which are used by women for the prevention of conception, or which aggravate the chemical state of the tissues which is essential for its development and against which the only

adequate and natural counteractant is semen. In the decade between 1926 and 1936, deaths from cancer of the womb rose from 12,654 to 16,230, an increase of almost 30%.

Had medicine's consciousness of its social responsibilities been derived from the Christian philosophy which is the basis of our political structure, we would not now be witnessing so many bewildering paradoxes, among them the cry of a people for relief from the result of its own excesses, and a profession on the defensive against the results of its own counsel or indifference.

Deficit in Babies Called Alarming

Medical progress has cut the infant death rate in twenty years from 200 deaths in each 1,000 live births to 50 deaths. "It is possible that by more intensive work this mortality rate can be further reduced, but at best this can be only a small fraction of the previous reduction," Doctor Helmholtz, President of the American Academy of Pediatrics, remarked. "There was a very marked increase in the birth rate immediately after the World War, but this has gradually dropped off. At present it is the lowest in the history of our country. It would seem that in spite of our best efforts in behalf of infants and children in recent years, we have a great deficit in babies at present." —*New York Times*.