

May 1967

Proceedings: Conference on the Responsibility of the Physician in a Changing Society

Hugh E. Dunn

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

Recommended Citation

Dunn, Hugh E. (1967) "Proceedings: Conference on the Responsibility of the Physician in a Changing Society," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 34 : No. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol34/iss2/5>

Conference on The Responsibility of the Physician in a Changing Society

VERY REVEREND HUGH E. DUNN, S.J.

President
John Carroll University
Cleveland, Ohio

Perhaps the readers of the LINACRE QUARTERLY wonder why a liberal arts university was involved in a professional conference, such as our medical seminar on "The Responsibility of the Physician in a Changing Society," the proceedings of which are being published in this issue. There are, we believe, good reasons.

First, though John Carroll has students enrolled from many states it serves intensively the industrial area of northeastern Ohio. As a consequence, it must and does have a deep interest in the problems which exist in that great community. We at John Carroll cannot isolate ourselves, we must take a part in the civic life of the area which we serve. We must, where we can, help to throw light on the area's problems and hopefully help to solve them. Because we were convinced that medical problems are important to all of our neighbors in this total area, we felt it would be helpful if John Carroll were to organize and promote such a meeting.

Second, though John Carroll is a liberal arts university, it has a well integrated and thorough curriculum in the field of science. In physics, for instance, the number of our students, both on the under and post graduate levels, ranks us high on a national comparison. Our chemistry facilities are excellent. The \$4 million Science Building which we have begun to build and which will be ready for some classes in the fall, will vastly increase the scope of our science program.

Finally, a large number of young men who look forward to joining the medical profession take their pre-medical education at John Carroll. Among our graduates are more than 300 physicians. Of this very substantial number, 150 practice in the Greater Cleveland area. We, therefore, feel that we have a close relationship to the medical profession. We also feel that we have the pleasant obligation of being helpful to doctors individually and collectively, in any way we can.

It is a great source of encouragement that an important professional journal, the LINACRE QUARTERLY, feels our conference to be relevant to its readership. We sincerely appreciate the LINACRE making available "The Responsibility of the Physician in a Changing Society" to a national audience.

SCOPE

JOHN F. SHEEHAN, M.D.

Dr. Sheehan, Moderator of this Conference, is vice-president of the new Loyola University Medical Center at Hines, Illinois. Dr. Sheehan has been a Loyola faculty member for 27 years and chairman of the pathology department from 1940 to 1962. He had been dean of the Medical School since 1950, and in addition, is responsible for the teaching, research, and patient care activities in the University's new medical center.

The topic of this conference is the responsibility of the physician in a changing society. It is to be taken up from three standpoints, or perspectives:

1. From the standpoint of the community
2. From the standpoint of the government (public health agencies)
3. From the standpoint of the physician

I thought I might start by mentioning some of the factors that have caused change in society and as a correlative, similar factors which have changed medicine and, in so doing, have had an effect on society and posed problems for it. I have listed four: (1) the rise of science and technology, (2) the rise in the economic level, at least here in the United States, (3) emphasis on group action and interaction, and (4) the role of government.

With regard to science and technology, I think one of the most marked effects has been the change from an era of therapeutic nihilism to one of profound activity in the area of drugs. This immediately

brings to mind discoveries such as sulfa drugs, and later penicillin, which have brought an increase in longevity and the disappearance of many of the acute diseases with which we were afflicted, leaving us now with an aging population and a heavy preponderance of chronic disease. These in turn have presented problems on an economic level to the various agencies in the health fields.

Another effect of science due to the tremendous growth of new knowledge, is the fragmentation of medicine and the rise of specialization. Because of the expensive techniques that came from the attendant technology, emphasis has been placed on the hospital as the focus of health care as against the doctor's office and periodic visits to patient's homes. Technology has given rise to a large variety of paramedical personnel and various other health professions besides medicine. It has led to an increase in the number of physicians functioning full-time in institutions with a concomitant decrease in the number going into private practice.

Because of the great rise in the economic level, money has become available to the population in general, for services as against satisfaction of basic needs. Because of the ease of communication and its efficiency, individuals know what health care facilities are available, as well as their adequacy. Because people can pay for services, there is an increased demand. Furthermore, we have reached a point where people think they not only have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit

of happiness, but also a basic right to health. The cost of providing the type of care the American people feel they are entitled to, has stimulated various groups, public and private, to attempt to relieve the individual of the burden of complete payment for health care. The first of these "third-party payers" was the private pre-payment plan. Later the government became a third party. These are some of the factors that have to be reckoned with as we consider the role of the physician in a changing society.

In addition to the increased efficiency of medicine, the enhancement of public health, and the rise in the economic level, another factor has led to a greater demand for physicians' services — the marked increase in the population which many believe will outstrip the capacity of

medical schools to provide a sufficient number of physicians to provide adequate care. The increase in the number of aged has also increased the burden on physicians because this age group requires and demands more care.

There are also other factors that have disturbed the traditional relationship of the physician to his patients: the mobility of the population and access to groups and centers because of ease of travel. (Individuals no longer need to consult a physician in their immediate neighborhood. They can go to a center or a clinic group.) Urbanization has contributed. Finally, there is little doubt that we are in a period in which individuals, at some sacrifice in personal relationship with physicians, are inclined to approach institutions, predominantly hospitals, for definitive medical care.