August 1960

Musings of a Layman

Charles E. Berry
If you want to make your patients happy, charge them a fee sufficiently large to provide after-dinner conversation. For some reason, my attempts at small talk fail because I have never been fortunate enough to be what could honestly state, "victimized by a physician." Lampooning the medical profession has not only become fashionable, it has become a science. This worries me, a layman whose slight knowledge of medicine is the result of osmosis rather than any sincere effort to master the art of healing. Why should it worry me? What do I have at stake?

Since this is written for a publication geared to physicians, I would be insulting the intelligence of my readers if I intimated that an answer were necessary. Physicians know the answer, hospital personnel know the answer, but does Mr. Average Citizen know too?

May a troubled layman make a suggestion or two?

Organized medicine (admittedly an inaccuracy) has to snap the whip by purging (a despicable word) wherever possible, the increasing number of humorous (to the uniformed) cartoons which are sensitizing the public through an insidious and subtle type of therapy which in effect pictures the physician as a combination of Nero and Henry VIII and he public as a much maligned Tosca. The stories and quips with double meanings, the blast notoriety engendered when one physician makes a wrong turn are insidious. Your own technique, the power of suggestion, is being used to damage you and your profession.

Perhaps it is unfortunate that most physicians have little contact with the public they serve except when the doctor-patient relationship exists, a relationship not conducive to revealing honest attitudes. Pay a visit one day to the recreation rooms of some of our factories, or neighborhood sub- thumb through the periodicals available at any airline or railroad newsstand. It might be surprising to see what clippings are posted on the bulletin boards — not objectionable to anyone but you; yes, you will always be pictured as the big, bad wolf. How sad! Some may be reprints from your own periodicals.

Censorship — no, but counterattack, yes. Never underestimate the power of the press or the publicity of the average American. Why can't physicians get together? I was amused, surprised and stunned, in that order, when the administrator of one of our hospitals informed me that his staff did not want to grant staff membership to either the pathologist or the radiologist although the credentials committee recommended their acceptance. The staff was all for accepting them as department heads and so voted, but did not, apparently, want to accept them as physicians. It seems strange to a lay person that there should be a caste system among doctors, that some are considered technicians, others merely tolerated because they have not concentrated on one phase of medicine. But rather have given full attention to human misery in its totality. In years past, did administrators deny general practitioners the use of their hospitals; prevent radiologists from becoming members of the active staff? Or was it the medical staff that vetoed their acceptance?

To the average professional in other fields, the controversy involving methods of compensation is ludicrous. On my desk at the moment is a news release announcing the opening of a new clinic supported by Mr. Reuther's union. In it the statement is made that 75 full-time physicians will be employed by the clinic. In New Jersey, one of the Assistant District Attorneys has publicly announced an investigation into the relationships existing between physicians, specialists, and hospitals. He will probably pursue this if it is politically expedient and if he does an intelligent job, he can get rid of publicity for himself and his party at the expense of both hospitals and physicians. It will be difficult for even the best public relations firm to create a favorable image for men whose salaries run into the five and six figures after such publicity. The unfortunate aftertaste will be the impression that physicians salaries run into six figures and restrictive legislation will surely follow. Perhaps one remedy would be exchanging the cadillac for the Rambler as a status symbol.

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Why is medicine failing to attract our better young students in adequate numbers to meet the need? Many superficial answers are readily available — cost, time, and others. The real reason is just as apparent if one cares to research for it: the profession, as a profession has lost its appeal because its practice has politically expedient and if he does an intelligent job, he can get rid of publicity for himself and his party at the expense of both hospitals and physicians. It will be difficult for even the best public relations firm to create a favorable image for men whose salaries run into the five and six figures after such publicity. The unfortunate aftertaste will be the impression that physicians salaries run into six figures and restrictive legislation will surely follow. Perhaps one remedy would be exchanging the cadillac for the Rambler as a status symbol.

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the danger of being relegated to the position of civil servants.

It's absurd to oppose loss of autonomy by platitudes instead of correcting the cause. It may be too late to build dikes; perhaps the need now is for boats.

Medicine and its contribution to the health and happiness of every individual is not sufficiently appreciated because no one has taken the time to advise of the problems involved in practice. The physician is fast becoming a journeyman because no one has explained the intricacies of the profession. The physician must be given autonomy; he must be revered or all humanity suffers. This, it appears to me, is the task facing our County Medical Societies.

Mr. Berry is Associate Professor in Hospital Administration, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.

MEMENTO OF OUR PATRON SAINT

An attractive, oversize, oxidized medal of St. Luke is now available through the National Federation Office. Catholic physicians will want to carry this remembrance of their Patron Saint.

Order now and for distribution to those attending the "White Mass" on October 18.

Write to:
National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds
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St. Louis 4, Missouri

Prices: 25c each, 50 for $10.00, 100 for $18.00, 500 for $80.00, and 1000 for $140.00.

ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC PHYSICIANS' GUILDS

IN THE NAME of our president, Dr. Eusebius J. Murphy of Bronx, New York, I wish to extend the greetings of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds to all of you attending the IX International Congress of Catholic Doctors. I consider it a privilege to be asked to speak to this group and to bring you a report of the activities of your American colleagues.

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds was formulated in 1927 by the late Dr. Richard A. Rendich in Brooklyn, New York, following a retreat for Brooklyn Catholic physicians. The "retreat group" became a "Guild." These physicians practiced in their daily lives the inspiration they had received in the retreat. The movement spread slowly, with the majority of Guilds organizing in eastern United States. It was in 1932 that the various groups were united as one, and the Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds was founded.

The objectives of the Federation are:

To uphold the principles of the Catholic faith and morality as related to the science and practice of medicine.

To assist ecclesiastical authorities in the diffusion of the knowledge of Catholic medical ethics.

To uphold Catholic hospitals and their enforcement of Catholic moral principles in medical practice.

To these others may be added:

To increase the spiritual life of the Catholic doctor.

To make all doctors conscious of their dependence upon God in their daily practice of medicine.

In 1944 the Catholic Hospital Association offered its offices in St. Louis as a permanent location for the national headquarters. Growth was slow. In fact, there were only eleven Guilds in 1948. There were 60 in 1957 and in 1960 there are now 91 affiliated Guilds in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, with a total membership of 6,110. (Figure 1 shows the location of the individual Guilds.)

Individual Guilds vary in membership from 600 in Boston to 8 in Sheridan, Wyoming. They may include the Catholic physicians in

Dr. Holoubek is First Vice-President of the National Federation. As an official delegate to the IX International Congress of Catholic Doctors held in Munich, Germany, he gave this address on July 28, 1960.