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The MED NEWS

Vol. 2 No.5

Boston University School of Medicine

Nov. 22, 1960

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Editorial Board: Bill Billings, George E. Ghareeb, Henry T. Lew

Sophomore Board: Joseph Civetta, Richard Ham

- Letters From Our Readers -

From Dr. J. J. Byrne, Professor of Surgery  
and Director, Third Surgical Service, BCH

To the Editors:

The Class of 1960 of Boston University School of Medicine has founded the John B. Rhoads Memorial Fund and is entrusting it to the Benjamin Waterhouse Medical History Society to further interest in medical history by establishing an annual lectureship.

John B. Rhoads, born January 30, 1935, was the eldest of three sons in a family from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He went to Haverford College where his major study was history, particularly that of Europe and the medieval era. He was intimately acquainted with the 17th century English furniture as well as the county-by-county history of the State of Pennsylvania. Entering Boston University School of Medicine in September-1956, he found time to study the history of medicine in an exuberant and often penetrating fashion. His death on July 21, 1959, came at the end of his third medical school year.

The first John B. Rhoads Memorial lecturer will be Doctor William C. Gibson, Kinsman Professor of Neurological Research, University of British Columbia. His subject will be "Student Medical Researchers and Their Contributions." This meeting will be held at the Massachusetts Memorial Hospital (Evans-9 Amphitheatre), 750 Harrison Avenue, Boston 18, Massachusetts on November 28, 1960, at 7:30 P.M. All interested are invited to attend.

\*Would you kindly publish this notice?

Sincerely yours,

John J. Byrne, M.D.  
Secretary

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From a member of the Junior Class,  
name withheld on request.

This letter mainly concerns members of the third-year class and has been provoked by certain observations I have made in the clinics and hospital wards with regard to the handling of patients.

It seems to me that some time during a medical student's training, he must make the transition from being a student to becoming a physician. The most logical time, it seems to me, is the beginning of his active clinical experience, the third year.

From what I have observed, too many of us are not aware that such a transition must be made. We assume that it will automatically come about. We are not aware that when we enter a hospital or clinic wearing white coats and carrying black bags, we are regarded by the public and by patients as doctors, and, as such, are given credit for being much more than what we actually are. The public's esteem is something conferred on us by virtue of our external symbols and is something which we have not yet earned. I wonder, sometimes, whether our demeanor and behavior deserve such gratuitous respect.

We chatter and laugh loudly as we course through corridors. In clinics we are unaware that we are part of an organization consisting of nurses, students, and staff doctors and that some degree of coordination between members of that organization is necessary. Granted that this coordination is sometimes upset by staff and visiting doctors appearing late, we contribute to confusion by crowding into already cramped cubicles to hear, see, and feel some "interesting case" while we keep other patients waiting unnecessarily long outside.

Friendly jesting and wisecracks addressed to classmates called by familiar epithets are out of place in a clinic where patients are coming presumably because they are suffering. Discussing diagnoses in front of patients, when the intent is not to explain to the patient or somehow to use such a diagnostic

discussion therapeutically with a patient, is often disconcerting and troublesome to that patient. He never really finds out what is wrong with him, because nobody really bothers to tell him, and he feels like a nonentity or an interesting pathological specimen. Too often students confront patients with an attitude that gives away their disinterest in the patient as a person with feelings and reveals their primary interest in him as an example of some rare disease.

I do not think many of us have thought very deeply about what a doctor-patient relationship means. In eliciting histories too often we convey the impression, intentionally or unintentionally, of using patients for our selfish motives, as, for example, to achieve the satisfaction of making the "right" diagnosis, by showing impatience at irrelevant answers, by blindly driving questions instead of listening, and by snickering at suspected falsehoods. We sometimes approach patients with some pre-formed moral judgment, especially if the patient is mentally dull, lives in slums on welfare, is an alcoholic, or is emotionally disturbed. Too often we are hypocritical in our terse "bedside manner" when we attempt to sympathize, to console, or to minimize the importance of some sign or symptom.

Although we may not yet have the knowledge and experience to be adequate practitioners, we all have the potential now to develop the art of medicine. I think it is time that we become aware of the needs of our patients as human beings and to respect them as such. To consider any patient as inferior is to infer, presumptuously, that we are superior. Is it not more accurate to say that we have been more fortunate, and that we have entered the medical profession to help those who have been less fortunate?

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From Dr. Rosenblatt, Assistant in Psychiatry

To the Editors:

Please place my name on the mailing list to receive regularly, copies of "Med News".

Thank you.

Malcolm Rosenblatt, M.D.

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Calendar: The Annual Student Council Gala Christmas Dance will be held Friday night, 8-1, December 9, at the 1200 Beacon Street Hotel.

Prof. J. J. Byrne will speak at the Alpha Kappa Kappa lecture series.

A pre-Christmas Dance Cocktail party for Phi Delta Epsilon members and guests will take place at 6 at the apt. of Editors Henry Lew and George Ghareeb, 122 Babcock Street, Brookline.

PDE, Tufts Chapter, invites all PDE members at BU to attend their dance Sat., Nov. 26 8:00 P.M. at Posner Hall, Harrison Avenue. Coattails will be served. No charge for PDE members.

Prof. Matthew Arnold Derow will speak under PDE auspices, Tues, Dec. 6, 5:00 P.M. in Building A, on "Parasitology in a Central American Setting". A dinner is planned following the talk.

The Med School Hockey team defeated the Law School 3-2; CIT, 4-2, CBS won 2-1.  
Capt. Art Carriere      Team: Ira Kowal, Jack Miller, John Towne, Jerry Hazard, Don Norman, Carl Olsson, Fran Boudreau, George Walcott, Carter Tallman, Jim Brown, Bob England, Alan Bennett, Marc Richmond,