

# Sophisticated Medicine, and Medical Ignorance

Royal Lee presents  
some classic quotes  
from informed MDs

By ROYAL LEE, D.D.S.

The following definitions are provided by Webster's Dictionary:

1) **MEDICINE**, the science and art of diagnosing, treating, curing and preventing disease, relieving pain, and improving and preserving health.

2) **SOPHISTICATED**, characterized by a lack of simplicity or naturalness; refined to the point of artificiality.

Voila! There you have it! But the cloak of sophistication about which the dogmatists have huddled is beginning to rip at the seams as evidenced by a recent editorial in the Journal of the American Medical Association (June 3, 1961) which states:

*"Vast as is the current knowledge in the basic sciences, Thomas (Professor, Dept. of Medicine, N.Y. Univ. School of Medicine) suggests that we include a course in the medical school curriculum entitled 'Medical Ignorance.' Further study might provide the top-echelon students with a subsequent course entitled 'Advanced Medical Ignorance.' These are not facetious suggestions. It may be as important to discover and to document our deficiencies in knowledge as to bend every effort to insure maximum use of available knowledge. The need for exposing our weaknesses is amply illustrated at the bedside."*

We also are cautioned against medical ignorance (and its guise of sophistication) by William Boyd, M.D., author of Boyd's Pathology, a standard medical textbook, who states: "He (the student of medicine) will also learn to recognize that ignorance, however aptly veiled in an attractive phraseology, still remains ignorance. . . . If we continually interfere with nature, we must pay the penalty."

What does he mean specifically? With this he leaves no doubt as evidenced by his statement which follows:

"Old diseases are passing away as the results of the assaults of modern therapy, but new ones are continually taking their place. The inn that shelters for the night is not journey's end. Many of these new diseases . . . are the result of the well-

meant but injudicious use of therapeutic agents.

"In these days when tranquilizers take the place of baby-sitters, blood transfusions are given thoughtlessly, exposure to diagnostic or therapeutic ionizing radiation has become so universal, antibiotics are regarded as the cure-all for the most minor infections, and steroid therapy is the refuge of the destitute, it is small wonder that the old maladies are replaced by new man-made ones, and that allergies to a multitude of antigens have become so commonplace they are said to exceed pathogenic microorganisms in number."

The above statement, as almost everyone will agree, is an apt summary of the present-day situation in medicine. And what does this outstanding medical pathologist offer as hope to the medical student? We find some interesting new definitions and observations creeping into medical textbooks. Listen to this:

*"Disease may be defined as merely a summation of chemical reactions that have gone wrong."*

" . . . but we have already seen that the change (in degeneration) is a biochemical lesion rather than a histological one, in which case the microscope will reveal no abnormalities."

"But the student in his new-found enthusiasm for pathology must not forget that it is the whole patient who comes to consult the doctor, not just a disordered liver, a cardiac lesion, a lump in the breast, or a painful knee."

*"Metabolism is the sum total of the chemical reactions which proceed in the cells. The tools of these reactions are the enzymes or metabolic catalysts present in vast numbers in every cell. The enzyme reactions are extremely sensitive to injurious influences such as poisons, loss of nutrition, etc. The breakdown of the enzyme systems results in sickness or death of the cell."*

"The physiological state of the patient may determine the outcome of infection just as much as the intensity of the infective agent."

"The concept of auto-immunity, which

might more appropriately be termed auto-sensitivity, is one of far-reaching importance, and at the present moment we stand only on its threshold. It is possible that a number of diseases which in the past have been labeled idiopathic, that is to say of unknown etiology, may prove to be caused by an auto-immune mechanism."

We should be grateful to these medical doctors who attest to medical ignorance, a term which should be benevolently received, not ridiculed. But how different their evaluation is from the medical sophisticates who bow before the artificiality of dogma and wear the blinders of orthodoxy.

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