

Letters To The Editor

The Editor,
Dalhousie Medical Journal.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Grant's article *On the State of Medical Education* is certainly refreshing, the more so since the present fashion appears to be advocacy of an expansion of the perimeters of the medical and pre-medical curricula. No doubt his rather offhand use of "relevant" and "vital" has exposed him to the charge of begging a few questions; and it may well be that those things "that are not absolutely pertinent to modern medicine" cannot be determined with an exactness which he seems to imply. Such niceties aside, however, it does appear—from whatever vantage point third year can claim to offer—that not a little of our limited time in medical school has been compromised by various procedures and projects which have yielded very little that will be applied in the practice of medicine.

More interesting is the question raised concerning the desirability of the present duration of the pre-medical course. Presumably the philosophy underlying the three- or four-year pre-medical course is that this course should achieve two purposes, to wit (1) to provide the necessary scientific knowledge to enable one to tackle the subjects in the medical curriculum, and (2) to provide the embryo doctor with a broad education. Mr. Grant argues—with some merit—that the first of these purposes could be accomplished in less than three years. Concerning the second purpose, two questions, at least, have to be answered. First, is this important enough to justify the time and expense of two or three extra years in an already long and expensive university course? Second, is this being accomplished by the present pre-medical course? (After all, a broadening education which fails to broaden is a waste of time.) Obviously on the first of these questions much can be written both for and against, and one's final position will be essentially a value judgement. It is on the second question, however, that grave doubts can be raised concerning the wisdom of the prolonged pre-medical course, since it is questionable whether the great majority of those who endure this trial are broadly educated in even the loosest sense of the term. (Try asking the first five medical students you meet to summarize the plot of *Hamlet*, to name two operas written by Wagner, to identify Fackson Pollock.)

If, then, the pre-medical education is providing us with scientific knowledge which we do not need for the study of medicine proper—*vide* Mr. Grant—and if it is not providing the vast majority of students with a broad education, what can justify its present length?

Yours etc.,
L. Wm. Caines, '66

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The Editor,
Dalhousie Medical Journal.

Dear Sir,

For a magazine article to be considered good, it should stimulate thought, and provoke argument. This I learned in undergraduate English somewhere along the way. As such, then, Mr. Grant's article qualifies.

I feel I must, however, take exception to a few of the more sweeping statements offered by him. He presented his personal views; I wish to offer mine.

Perhaps the most offending statement was the one stating that "many are content to take on the role of general practitioner"—I wish only to say that to most, this type of doctor represents the Alpha and Omega of medicine—as such, then, it could hardly be a position which one could consider as anything other than a considerable attainment. Because I feel strongly about this point, perhaps it would be wiser to let my discretion play the larger part, and refrain from enlarging upon this.

Mr. Grant would delete the Arts—or perhaps dilute them. Again I must take exception, and say that I feel much more than just the mechanics of English are in these courses. To read is to experience; to experience is to enlarge upon one's outlook, and appreciate conditions and opinions that otherwise we would never be exposed to. The art and science of Medicine take us far away from the main stream of normal living and appreciating things that most people have the time to appreciate—and to write about. Without a proper English background, we cannot choose books and read intelligently. Besides all this, cultivating a little outside interest in things other than medicine should be the aim of all doctors—it is necessary; even in just being good doctor, to "get away from it" for a bit—and how can we do this, without a proper English background? How can we appreciate all that has gone before us, without reading? No, Mr. Grant, I must take exception with you.

I must agree with the thought proposed by Mr. Grant concerning the idea of modified science courses such as Chemistry and Mathematics, such courses revamped to emphasize the needs of doctors, would serve to more than increase the interest in the subjects, in undergrad years. Also I must agree with the comment made concerning the lab courses and their relative importance and emphasis—perhaps some of the departments could follow the example of our Pharmacology Department and its closed circuit T.V. setup and available professors to explain and emphasize the pertinent points, rather than just getting lost in the rigmarole of an experiment, and losing sight of its object, principle and so forth. These are modern times and we as modern students are expected to learn sophisticated theories—why should we carry on as we are now? To say the least, it is gross misapplication of emphasis.

In closing, may I commend Mr. Grant for an excellent, thought provoking article.

Sincerely,

D. Duncan Murray, '67