

SYMPOSIUM (1)

ON THE VALUE OF PRECEPTORSHIP TRAINING

PART I

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One must learn
 By doing the thing; for though you
 think you know it
 You have no certainty, until you try.
 Sophocles (496?-406 BC)

For a number of years now, Dalhousie Medical School has conducted a general practice preceptorship, thereby exposing fourth year medical students to the trials and tribulations of a busy general practice for a week's duration. During this time, the "eager" student observes, assists, discusses and yea advises his Preceptor on the management and conduct of his practice. Working along with the doctor, one finds the hours to be long, the work insurmountable, the problems endless but the Art satisfying.

It is axiomatic that most medical schools are centres of diagnostic and medical acumen. Students learn and study about a myriad of entities which include common and the rare, but oft time too much emphasis is placed on that which is covered only by the "small print" of medical texts. The preceptorship affords an all too brief opportunity to study the common things - that which afflicts the population generally.

During our medical education we have no teaching in the management of an office on the conduct of a general practice. The preceptorship offers a golden period in which to see, discuss and learn how these things are accomplished. The matter of keeping accurate records and being able to find them, appointments, billing, arranging one's daily activities is taught and practised.

Most will agree that the prime aim of the Dalhousie Medical School is to graduate doctors fully capable to enter general prac-

tice. To do this without firsthand knowledge is pointless. Some medical schools have a much longer preceptorship than we have here at Dalhousie, even going as far as to have the student live in with a general practitioner in a rural area.

Personally, I do not think this would be acceptable to most students. The preceptorship is an integral part of our medical education. There should be no thought of abolishing it, and to increase it without letting the student take a more active part in the patient care will border on the monotony. It was Sir William Osler who said:

"A well trained sensible family doctor is one of the most valuable assets in a community, worth today, as in Homer's time, many another man . . . Free men, live lives of more devoted self sacrifice".

The value of preceptorship lies not in what it teaches us but in what we learn from it.

PART II

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Immediately following the last World War there was a tremendous surge within the medical profession towards specialization. The dedicated, hard working g.p., in his quest for greater knowledge and scientific

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