

Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Geneeskunde : South African Medical Journal

VAN DIE REDAKSIE

JAARDAG VAN DIE STELLENBOSCHE MEDIESE SKOOL

In 'n land soos Suid-Afrika moet die stigting van 'n nuwe mediese skool as 'n heel besondere gebeurtenis beskou word. Maar, dit is nie soseer die *feit* van die totstandkoming van 'n addisionele mediese skool as sodanig wat van belang is nie. Van veel groter betekenis is die wetenskaplike en kulturele fundering van daardie skool. Die kernvraag is *nie* hoeveel mediese skole daar in die land is nie, *maar wel* in hoeverre elke mediese skool, en nou ook hierdie nuwe een, hom dit ten doel stel om bo alles 'n volwaardige akademiese en wetenskaplike inrigting te word.

Om hierdie rede is dit dus verblydend om te sien dat die Mediese Skool van Stellenbosch besluit het om sy eerste jaardag nie met oppervlakkige trompetgeskalm van uiterlike vertoon te vier nie, maar wel deur middel van 'n dag gewy aan wetenskaplike voordragte en uitstallings—op grond dus van navorsingswerk waarmee alreeds 'n oortuigende begin aan die Skool gemaak is.

By die geleentheid van hierdie jaardag is 12 wetenskaplike voordragte gelewer deur lede van die doserende personeel, en 9 wetenskaplike uitstallings is gereël. 'n Aantal van die voordragte is vir publikasie aan hierdie blad beskikbaar

gestel en die Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Geneeskunde, as vakblad van die Mediese Vereniging van Suid-Afrika, beskou dit as 'n besondere voorreg om spesiale ruimte vir hierdie bydraes af te staan by wyse van 'n gebaar van welwillendheid en van verwelkoming.

Ons wil die hoop uitspreek dat al die lede van die personeel van hierdie skool ook aktiewe en produktiewe medewerkers van ons *Tydskrif* sal word en sal bly, want dan sal hulle nie net meehelp om die naam van die Mediese Skool van Stellenbosch groot te maak nie; hulle sal ook help om 'n ideaal van one hele Mediese Vereniging te verwesenlik, naamlik om ook ons blad tot iets groots en goeds uit te bou—'n blad waarop elke afsonderlike lid van die Mediese Vereniging trots sal kan wees.

Die jaardag wat die Skool gereël het en die bydraes wat ons in hierdie uitgawe van ons blad plaas, dien as bewys van die erns waarmee die Mediese Skool van Stellenbosch sy taak aanpak en as teken dat dit die skool se uitgesproke begeerte is om in die eerste en laaste plek in die diens te staan van die mediese wetenskap. Mag hierdie skool lank, suksesvol en glansryk voortleef!

EDITORIAL

ON READING A PAPER

No one, if he is wise, will ever read a paper at a medical meeting. No, we are not advocating another variety of boycott but merely commenting on how difficult it is to hold the attention of the audience when one does read a paper. We are sure that this agrees with the experience of most of our readers. Most of the time one sees the top of the speaker's head with every now and again a fleeting glimpse of his eyes as he looks to his audience. (One often wonders whether he does this to convince himself that the audience is still there!) But, joking aside, it is true that a paper presented as a talk is much more likely to be appreciated than one that is read. As a speaker reads from his notes it is very difficult to prevent his listener's attention from wandering. A speaker who looks at his audience is able to instil something of his personality into his talk and this animation helps a great deal towards holding the audience's attention. It is true that this is the ideal which not every one can achieve. Sometimes the subject matter is difficult and complicated, and serious errors might occur if notes are not frequently referred to. But we would suggest that such a topic is not a suitable one for a presentation of this kind. If the speaker finds himself in this difficulty it is fairly certain that the audience is in even greater trouble in understanding what is being said. By assiduous training it is often possible for a poor speaker to become, if not a brilliant speaker, at least one who can 'put it across' successfully. It is often remarked that it is essential for the speaker

to be master of his subject. Though the best talks are not always given by those who know most about a particular field, yet a clear understanding of the subject by the speaker is of great assistance in presentation. If only by being master of the subject to such an extent that he does not need to read his paper, the speaker has ensured a degree of simplification which will add greatly to the clarity of the address. If the ideas are crystal clear in the speaker's mind he will be in a better position to convey them to the audience.

One of the troubles is that speakers will try to cover the subject completely. This may be necessary in a formal presentation in a written paper. But the same degree of completeness is not so essential in a verbal presentation. It is unlikely that anyone in the audience will spot an omission and if he does it can often be dealt with subsequently in the form of a question. Even if the paper which has been 'read' is to be published it is not essential that the one version should be an exact copy of the other. For ease of presentation and for the sake of clarity it is often advisable to simplify the verbal communication, provided one does not mislead the audience in any way. For unless the talk is being recorded it is very unlikely that anyone will notice the difference when, some time later, he sees the address in print! In this way there can be two papers, one suitable for 'reading' and one for 'publishing'. Papers which are suitable for the one form of presentation are rarely suitable for the other. But the better speakers merely have a list of points to which they can refer as they talk—glancing at their paper as they

do so to show that their talk and their paper are, in fact, one and the same thing.

In these days of colour photography and the almost universal availability of photographic projectors there is little excuse for the absence of slides. It is incredible how a few well-drawn graphs or tables of figures can transform what might otherwise be a very dull and unintelligible paper. But almost as much care and skill must be used in the preparation of these slides as in the actual experiments. It ought to be obvious to anyone that the fewer the facts on a single slide the more likely is it that the audience will appreciate the point! But we have all seen slides projected on a screen, filled from top to bottom with a mass of figures. They are often invisible to all but those in the front rows of the audience; and even those benefit but little for they are unable to sort out the essential core of facts from the flood of details which cover the rest of the slide—even if they get time to read them before the slide is snatched away. Once again the fault has been that the speaker has striven for completeness and has sacrificed clarity. Another fault is bad preparation of the slides themselves. Typescript can be used, but requires care to ensure legibility. It should only be used sparingly. Stencils are easily procurable and with a little practice almost anyone can be trained to produce respectable graphs or tables.

Modern statistical methods have made it possible to condense a large mass of figures, so that the tables can often be reduced to two or three figures with a significance level. With a brief word of explanation the speaker can make clear to those members of the audience who do not understand this method of presentation what is and what is not important. The finer details of the variation between individual readings can be brought out by means of the standard deviation or amplified later either in discussion or in the subsequent publication. Histograms, scattergrams or simple graphs can often be used to advantage and drive home a point far better than minutes of talking. It is of course important for the slides to be shown in proper order, and not upside down or back to front. A few minutes spent with the projectionist beforehand—perhaps a trial of some of the slides in the projector—should avoid those embarrassing moments when the slide is tried in every possible position before the correct one is discovered.

Finally, is it too much to ask of a speaker that he should not talk too fast and yet not exceed his allotted time? If he cannot finish on time, or only by racing through his paper, he should either ask for more time before he starts, or shorten and simplify his talk. The latter is usually to be preferred, for strangely enough in so doing he will almost always improve his paper beyond all recognition.