

DERMATOLOGISTS AND RADIO THERAPY

Dr. L. J. A. Loewenthal has addressed the following letter to the Editor from 604 Medical Centre, 209 Jeppe Street, Johannesburg, under date 19 August 1958:

Dr. Weinbren's article on Dermatologists and Radiotherapy¹ cannot be allowed to pass without comment. I have been asked by the Committee of the Dermatologists' Sub-group of the Medical Association to incorporate the subjoined memorandum in this letter.

MEMORANDUM OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE DERMATOLOGISTS' SUB-GROUP ON RADIO THERAPY IN SKIN DISEASE

Following Dr. Weinbren's recent article in the *South African Medical Journal* on radiotherapy for skin disease, the members of the dermatological sub-group were asked to state their views on the controversial issues raised therein. This inquiry yielded among others the following comments which seemed to be worthy of mention.

1. *Training in Radiotherapy.* The International Committee on Dermatological Education has laid down minimum requirements for the training of dermatologists in the use of radiation therapy. The sub-group therefore feels that no attempts should be made to prevent South African specialists from fulfilling these internationally recognized requirements.

2. *Personal Character of the Views Expressed.* Dr. Loewenthal's paper, read at Congress, was the object of Dr. Weinbren's main comments. Stated as a footnote it was said that Dr. Loewenthal's paper was read at a combined meeting of the Dermatology and Radiology sections. The paper was requested in the first instance by the radiologists' group, and was given and received in an extremely amicable atmosphere. Dr. Weinbren, whose views and attitudes differ from those of his group as expressed at the meeting, had been asked on that occasion to open the discussion on his group's behalf, but attended another congress meeting instead. His opinions therefore are obviously his own, and do nothing to disturb the existing good relationships between the groups.

3. *Future Editorial Policy.* The dermatologists' committee felt that when highly controversial and personal articles are submitted to the *Journal*, they could be more carefully handled in publication.* It is suggested that where the editor sees fit to publish articles that contain personal criticisms, he should consider publishing simultaneous replies as a means of preserving good professional relationships.

4. *Investigations in Britain.* The British Association of Dermatology has submitted copies of a correspondence between themselves and Dr. Weinbren to their affiliated group, the Transvaal Dermatological Society. Permission to use this material has been obtained from both societies and the committee publishes the correspondence herewith, and feels that the letters are self-explanatory.

LETTER DATED 28 JANUARY 1958 FROM DR. M. WEINBREN TO THE SECRETARY, BRITISH INSTITUTE OF DERMATOLOGY, ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL FOR DISEASES OF THE SKIN, LISLE STREET, LONDON, W.C. 2.

I should be grateful for any information you can give me concerning the training of dermatologists in radiotherapy.

Some years ago when I made enquiries I was informed by telephone that there was no organized course in radiotherapy for dermatologists nor was there any examination for dermatologists in radiotherapy. In fact I was given to understand that the British Institute of Dermatology discouraged the students taking diplomas in dermatology from practising radiotherapy.

Has the position changed in recent years and is radiotherapy taught as part of the curriculum for the diplomas or degrees in dermatology and are the students expected to do practical work in radiotherapy and are they examined on the subject before getting their diplomas, if there are diplomas or degrees in dermatology?

As the Faculty of Radiology of the S.A. College of Physicians and Surgeons has the matter under discussion, I should be very grateful for an early reply.

*There was no lack of care in the handling of Dr. Weinbren's contribution. —Editor

LETTER DATED 13 FEBRUARY 1958 FROM THE SECRETARY, BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGY, TO DR. WEINBREN

Thank you for your letter. I think that you must have been misinformed, even some years ago, about the absence of organized courses in radiotherapy for dermatologists or about the examinations for dermatologists in radiotherapy. Organized courses in radiotherapy do exist for dermatologists in various centres in Great Britain. There is no diploma in dermatology in this country, although various universities and colleges, particularly in Leeds and Edinburgh, grant degrees or diplomas in general medicine with dermatology taken as a special subject. In the syllabus for this examination radiotherapy is an integral part and questions may well be set on various aspects of radiotherapy applicable to dermatology. In both hospital and private work in this country there is no statutory limitation either in theory or practice on dermatologists undertaking radiotherapeutic procedures applicable to their specialty.

At the same time that I received your letter I also received a letter from one of my South African dermatological colleagues and have written to him in similar terms.

If there are any queries at any time, would you please let me know.

LETTER FROM DR. WEINBREN TO THE SECRETARY, BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGY (DATE NOT SUPPLIED)

Many thanks for your letter of 13 February. You no doubt know that there is a specialists register in South Africa, probably the only place in the world where such a register exists. While the general practitioner may practise what he likes, once a doctor adopts a speciality he is obliged to practise that speciality only. A dermatologist being registered in S.A. as a specialist, does not have to show that he has had adequate or any training in radiotherapy. The patient being referred or going to the dermatologist may, therefore, be treated by that dermatologist with X-ray therapy, whether he has been adequately trained in radiotherapy or not. I understand from your letter that there are universities and colleges which give degrees and diplomas in general medicine with dermatology as a special subject. For registration here the dermatologist need not take these diplomas or degrees. He could for example take an M.D. or some university degree which does not include dermatology as a special subject. I understand that most of the hospitals carry out their radiotherapy for dermatological conditions in the radiotherapy departments, so that the treatment in these institutions is under the control of the radiotherapist and not under the dermatologist. This is particularly true in the case of malignant diseases, including rodent ulcers. Dermatologists seldom undertake treatment of malignant diseases of the skin. While, then, there would not appear to be any statutory limitations either in theory or practice to the dermatologist doing radiotherapy, there are these automatic limitations in most of the hospitals, but not in private practice.

I should be most grateful if you could inform me whether I have interpreted your letter correctly and also whether there is limitation in Great Britain on the use of radio-active isotopes by dermatologists.

LETTER DATED 11 JULY 1958 FROM THE SECRETARY BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGY TO DR. WEINBREN

Thank you for your letter. Your interpretation of my letter is not altogether accurate and I will try to explain the misunderstanding.

I appreciate from your letter that a doctor can be placed on the specialist register in South Africa without having any diploma to indicate that he has had a special training in that specialty. That, for good reasons or bad, is exactly the state of affairs in the United Kingdom, and indeed it is only a very small minority of dermatologists practising in the United Kingdom who possess a particular diploma or degree in dermatology, such as the M.D. of Leeds or the M.R.C.P. of Edinburgh, in both of which dermatology can be taken as a special subject.

It is again quite inaccurate to say that the radiotherapy of skin disorders in most hospitals in the United Kingdom is under the control of the radiotherapist. In many hospitals the skin department has its own radiotherapy unit and is solely responsible

for any treatment given to disorders of the skin, malignant or otherwise. In others, radiotherapy for disorders of the skin is carried out in the department of radiotherapy, in order to avoid duplication of staff. In these circumstances the dermatologist prescribes the dosage for the ordinary dermatoses and the dosage for malignant lesions is a matter of *mutual* arrangement between the dermatologist and the radiotherapist. I must emphasize, however, that many dermatological centres in this country prescribe for and treat malignant disorders without any reference to a radiotherapist.

My own comments will be brief. The letters quoted above answer Dr. Weinbren's objections, in one case *before* his article appeared in print. I only regret that it should be in the columns of your esteemed *Journal* that a friendly interchange of views should have degenerated into an undignified display of sophis-

try, in which a shrewd reader may even detect a suggestion of personal animus.

One last point: Dr. Weinbren implies that, because he could not locate the well-known journals *Strahlentherapie* and *Archiv für klinische und experimentelle Dermatologie*, I may have 'borrowed' some of my references from a booklet called 'The A.B.C. of the Dermopan'. Ignoring the last, which is apparently already available to Dr. Weinbren, I can at least offer him access to the second, to which I subscribe, and to many reprints from the first, including of course Schmitz's article, if he wishes to study at first hand some of the recent advances in radiotherapy which he depreciates.

REFERENCE

1. Weinbren, M. (1958): S. Afr. Med. J., 32, 565.