

BOEKBESPREKINGS : BOOK REVIEWS

ESSENTIAL HYPERTENSION

The Nature of Essential Hypertension. By Sir George Pickering, M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.S. Pp. viii + 151. Illustrated. R2.25. London: J. & A. Churchill Ltd. 1961.

More than 20 years of research and thinking have brought Pickering to the conclusion that essential hypertension is a quantitative manifestation of blood pressure, rather than a qualitative disease entity. This concept of his has not remained unchallenged, and in this monograph he sets out to answer his critics. He writes with great conviction and it is difficult not to be carried away by his train of thought.

There can be no dividing line between two types of people, those with normal pressures and those who are hypertensive. There is nothing specific to the hypertensive, no known changes in the vascular system which may be regarded as pathognomonic of a hypertensive state, no clinical picture which is characteristic.

The degree of rise in blood pressure is inherited on a polygenic basis and is the sum of the factors which influence blood pressure and which are inherited from both parents. This pattern of inheritance is compared to that of the inheritance of stature. On this point he has been severely

criticized by Platt, and Pickering has produced much evidence to prove that the inheritance is graded in character and that it is not bimodal as suggested by Platt.

Furthermore, the height of blood pressure is determined by a variety of environmental factors, some of which are known and others not. Evidence is produced to show that physical exercise, large families and high salt intake are associated with lower blood pressures.

Malignant hypertension alone is a specific lesion in the form of fibrinoid degeneration and a characteristic clinical picture, but this is a quantitative phase of hypertension of whatever cause and is related to the height of the diastolic blood pressure.

Whatever the truth may be and, as he rightly points out, truth is a relative and incomplete matter, the wisdom of his line of reasoning cannot be gainsaid. This is reflected particularly in his advice with regard to therapy: to remove fear by simple explanation of facts; restore confidence by removal of irksome restrictions; and consider therapy in relation to the height of the blood pressure for the individual, the family history, the blood-cholesterol level, and other factors such as cardiac enlargement.

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