

INAUGURAL PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS*

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On behalf of the Officers of this Branch and myself I thank you all for the confidence you have displayed in us by electing us as the first Branch Council. We will endeavour to deserve the trust you have placed in us and to conduct the affairs of this Branch as efficiently as possible.

I should like to welcome our many visitors to this meeting, and to thank you one and all for the time you have given up to be with us. Some of you have travelled vast distances to be with us at this first Annual General Meeting and we hope that when you leave you will feel that it has all been worth-while. Our invitations to you were based, I can assure you, on the most selfish motives. Not only do we want the pleasure of your company and your moral support, but we look to you, particularly the more senior and experienced visitors, to give us what advice you can to help this new Branch to build a sturdy foundation for the future. It is one of the disadvantages of this vast country of ours that our profession is so widely scattered that few of us have the pleasure of meeting the leaders of the Medical Association. We all know by name and reputation who the President of the Medical Association is, and who the Chairman of the Federal Council is and who the President of the Orange Free State Branch is, but until today most of us will not have met you. The getting together of the members of the Association from far and wide is probably the most important function that this meeting will serve and only good can come out of the contacts, the exchanges of ideas and appreciation of one another that must follow. It is an invidious task to name only a few of the guests assembled here this afternoon, as all our guests are equally welcome, but I should like to introduce to you: Dr. P. F. H. Wagner, of East London, the President of the Medical Association of South Africa; Dr. J. H. Struthers, of Pretoria, Chairman of Federal Council; Dr. G. F. C. Troskie, of Kroonstad, President of the Orange Free State and Basutoland Branch; and Dr. P. D. Combrink, Assistant Secretary of the Medical Association.

Having attained Branch status and before we allow the heady atmosphere of this high altitude to bemuse our thinking, let us pause and look round from the new elevation at the perspectives about us.

Problems and Obligations

We now form a separate small Branch in the federal type of government into which the Medical Association has organized itself. As such, we have, provided we remain within the framework of the principles laid down by the Association, a more direct say in the handling of our internal affairs than we had as a

Division. We also now have direct representation on the Federal Council. This greater freedom brings with it greater responsibilities. Before making decisions in the future we shall have to bear in mind the fact that the consequences may extend beyond the borders of our area and affect neighbouring Branches, just as decisions of neighbouring Branches may, in matter of common interest, affect us. In these matters of common interest a satisfactory solution can only be reached by joint consultation, negotiation, and compromise so that the Branches concerned can present to the Association and to the outside world a workable scheme of action.

It has, perhaps, been one of the causes of friction within the Association, that large and powerful Branches, seeing a problem only through their own eyes, have been able to sway the Association into accepting their solution to the detriment of other Branches with the same problem, but under somewhat different circumstances. I therefore welcome the formation of new and smaller Branches within the Association such as we are forming today. This may eventually lead to the acceptance of the principle of differential solutions to problems which affect several Branches, so that each Branch may, with the understanding and cooperation of its neighbours, reach the most advantageous solution of its problem within the general terms of reference as laid down by the higher Councils of the Association.

Great pressure is brought to bear on the Medical Association by the Government and by financial and other lay groups, and the utmost in cooperation between the Branches themselves and between the Branches and the Medical Association will be needed so that a firm front may be offered to these forces. It has been encouraging to note that some of the anomalies pertaining to benefit societies are being removed at the moment and a far firmer and consistent attitude to benefit societies than that which existed a few years ago can be sensed. The medical aid society conception is sound. It allows a large number of people in the lower middle class, financially speaking, to obtain the standard medical service they might not be able to afford individually and, at the same time, their medical attendant gets an adequate remuneration.

The various medical insurance schemes are sound in concept but the methods adopted by some of the companies recently, (i) to obtain tariffs to which they are not entitled, (ii) to undermine with insidious propaganda the Medical Association, and (iii) to reduce benefits to their contributors and to suggest to them that doctors who do not reduce their fees in proportion to the lessened benefits are not quite playing the game, can only be deplored. This type of action can only be countered by unanimous determination by the profession to uphold the principles laid down by the Association. The next phase in the

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development of this struggle must inevitably be negotiation between the Association and the financial interests concerned, and it is here that the Association may be severely tested as never before. There is no easy answer to the problems but, whatever solution is reached, the Association must ensure that the profession emerges in control of its own destiny, free of lay bureaucracy and united in strength.

Having cast a glance over some of the problems of the wider world, let us examine the lie of the land closer to home. Before raising our voice in the higher Councils of the Medical Association let us put our own house in order. Let us use this occasion to reaffirm the promises and resolutions we have made in the past. We have much in our favour. I doubt whether any other Branch in the country can boast of 100% membership of all the doctors in private practice, within its area. We can present a united front to the rest of the world.

The Principle of Service

In our personal attitude let us adopt the highest ethical standards towards our colleagues and our patients. Let us endeavour to be tolerant, understanding and kindly when faced with the many

aggravations encountered in our daily rounds. Let us act with dignity in both our personal and public lives so that the honoured title 'doctor' will symbolize to those around us in this area what we ourselves would like it to do. Let avarice be tempered by consideration of others, greed by fairness, and self-interest by generosity. Let our main reward be satisfaction in the service we have rendered and not in the cheque that follows. Conscientious endeavour to maintain these high standards will enhance the prestige our profession has gained over the years and this new Branch will flourish in the moral and spiritual strength of its members.

Finally, I should like to place on record our appreciation of our neighbours and colleagues, the members of the Orange Free State and Basutoland Branch. From the beginning we have given them continuous headaches, yet we always met with courtesy from them and we were given the privilege of conducting our own affairs as they related to the special problems affecting this portion of their territory. Being in the same Province we share many common interests and we shall always have to work hand in hand. We salute you as our mother Branch and trust that you will go from strength to strength.