

EDITORIAL : VAN DIE REDAKSIE  
**CONFERENCE ON MEDICAL NEWS**

'When you've shouted "Rule Britannia", when you've  
 sung "God save the Queen",  
 When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth.'  
 Kipling: *The Absent-Minded Beggar*.

The doctors and the members of the press and the radio have met and have discussed their various problems. Now we must decide what, if anything, we have achieved. The Conference took place in Pretoria on Friday 4 July and Saturday 5 July under the chairmanship of Mr Justice J. F. Marais of the Transvaal bench. Attendance was excellent and there was no doubt that the various groups were ably represented.

After the opening of the Conference by Prof. C. H. Rautenbach, of the University of Pretoria, and Prof. S. F. Oosthuizen, the first paper was presented by Dr Charles G. Roland, editor of the medical publications of the Mayo Clinic. Professor Oosthuizen stressed the fact that we must not allow the famous first heart transplant to overshadow all our thinking in connection with medical news reporting, and Doctor Roland fully complied with his request by keeping entirely off the subject of epoch-making firsts and by confining his talk to the question of the release of results of medical research.

Professor Oosthuizen made the very important point that although we all know that it was Charles Lindbergh who flew the Atlantic Ocean for the first time, few of us know who did it the second time, and we must therefore accept that a human heart transplant is such an historical event that no objections can be raised about the publicity it received.

Prof. C. N. Barnard spoke about his experience with the press over the past 20 months and showed some slides illustrating some of the inaccuracies that have occurred mainly as a result of the quest for sensationalism. He was immediately criticized by Mr Piet Cillié, of *Die Burger*, who pointed out that what Professor Barnard had done was exactly the type of sensation seeking of which he was accusing the press. It is perhaps unfortunate that this heated exchange of words received more publicity than all the very sound arguments that were put forward.

Dr S. S. B. Gilder, Editor of the *World Medical Journal*, examined a few of our profession's sacred cows and came to the conclusion that we must be prepared to develop a more out-going policy. Some of our conservative attitudes stem more from habit than from conviction. These views were strongly supported by Mr Peter Bruce of the BBC Television Services. He made a plea for total mutual trust, without which no good medical news reporting could be possible, and asked the doctors to make sure that the press or all the news media always received all the facts, because only then could they be expected to do sound reporting.

The two editors of daily newspapers, Mr Piet Cillié of *Die Burger* and Mr René de Villiers of *The Star*, both questioned the doctors' conservative attitude towards the overworked word 'sensationalism'. They maintained that anything which is eminently readable and of great interest is basically sensational and that it is futile to keep such reporting out of newspapers.

At the end of the first day there was a general atmosphere of despondency about whether we were going to achieve anything of lasting value and Mr A. C. Papageorge, of the CSIR, requested the audience to step off the subject of single mistakes made by the press and to

rather give attention to more fundamental matters and to endeavour to find some over-all solution. His was a well-timed request, for at that stage the tendency had developed to regard the meeting as the ideal place to sling accusations at the press, for them to defend as best they could.

When the meeting reconvened the second day it was immediately obvious that there had been some soul-searching going on during the night, for the whole tenor of the Conference had changed for the better and with few exceptions everybody was prepared to work towards finding some kind of formula for the improvement of medical news reporting. Dr L. A. P. A. Munnik, of the Cape Provincial Administration, put up a final proposal that a committee of 7 persons be appointed who would be charged with working out possible details of closer co-operation between the press and the medical profession. An amendment was proposed by Professor Oosthuizen; in a future issue we will give more details about this motion and its amendment, when we have had time to investigate its practical implications and possibilities.

Such Conferences cost money and they also take up valuable time of people who can ill afford to waste it. We therefore beseech our readers and all those who attended this meeting not to now regard it as history and forget any good that might have come out of it. On thinking back about the various arguments that have been aired at this Conference, two impressions emerge very clearly: On the one hand, the doctors are inclined to regard secrecy as an autonomous, automatic state of affairs, not realizing that secrecy only has meaning when something has to be kept secret for a specific reason. Blanket secrecy is not only unnecessary; it is dangerous. It would be far more correct to assume that nothing need be kept secret unless there is a specific reason for doing so. The right of the patient of not having his diagnosis divulged is such a reason, for its importance need hardly be stressed. But there is unfortunately a tendency among doctors to think that all the results of research, the decisions of Federal Council and every other aspect of medicine are secret unless they must be divulged for some or other reason, and even then the release of the news hurts like the pulling of a tooth.

The other impression with which we left the Conference is that the news media are not sufficiently aware of the need for accuracy when it comes to the reporting of scientific material. They are not prepared to take enough trouble over the verification of facts before they are published. In this respect the point made by Doctor Roland that medical news was no less interesting after it had been held back in order to allow verification than if it had been prematurely released is a very important and valid one.

Let us now all sit back and take a long, sober and completely honest look at the matter of news reporting. If anybody is not satisfied with the manner in which he has been fulfilling his role in the dissemination of medical news—whether it be as a doctor who has to release the facts or as a journalist who has to gather them—let him now be honest with himself and resolve to improve matters, at least in the small sphere in which he has influence.

Not all doctors can be accused of being over-conservative and not all pressmen are irresponsible. There must be mutual trust and it must be total. Unless we can accept that, we have been wasting our time and money. And we sincerely hope that that has not been the case.

## GERAAS

Ons raas soos 'n klomp sprees in 'n kweperlaning. Hoor en sien vergaan en ons doen niks daaromtrent nie. Op alle vlakke en in elke gemeenskap neem die lawaai geleidelik toe. Selfs ons musiek word al hoe meer hoorbaar weens die gebruik van elektriese versterking van die geluid. Tot relatief onlangs kon mens nog sê dat dit net in die stede is waar daar geen rus meer is nie, maar dit is nie nou meer so nie. Die kleinste plattelandse dorpie het deesdae sy asblik gooiers of sy melkkan skommelaars en om langs die hoofpad stil te hou om die rus en vrede van die groot Karoo te geniet is iets van die verlede. Die stilte sal nie meer as 'n paar minute duur nie voor een of ander snorre-gevaarte dit verbreek.

Die probleem is dat mens metterwyl gewoon raak aan die geraas en dit later skaars meer merk. Ons aanvaar blykbaar as vanselfsprekend dat die bure se kuiergaste hul motordeur hard sal toeklap wanneer hulle vannag om 11 uur besluit om eindelijk huis toe te gaan en ons dink die luide sirenes waarmee sommige werknemers hul werkers roep of sommige skole hul leerlinge byeenkry 'n normale deel van die moderne lewe is. Is dit nodig om die skoolklok in 'n klein plattelandse skooltjie te lui asof dit die dode moet wek? Hoeveel van ons maak seker dat ons honde nie onnodig blaf en die rus versteur nie? As mens in enige voorstad 'n oomblikke stilstaan en doelbewus luister na die geblaf van die honde besef mens eers hoeveel van hulle daar is en hoe baie van hulle op enige gegewe moment te kere gaan.

Dat geraas 'n nadelige fisiese en psigiese effek het ly geen twyfel meer nie. Daar is reeds 'n indrukwekkende aantal publikasies in die wêreldliteratuur beskikbaar wat die skadelike uitwerking van aanhoudende geraas op die mens beklemtoon. Die Vereniging ter Bestryding van Geraas het onlangs 'n memorandum opgestel wat die verskillende aspekte van die probleem uiteensit. Dit is verblydend om te sien dat die saak wel intensiewe aandag geniet.

Wetgewing om geraas te beveg is noodsaaklik want daar sal ongelukkig altyd in enige gemeenskap 'n aantal persone wees wat slegs na geregtelike vervolging gewillig sal wees om saam te werk.

Met die beskikbare apparaat vir die bepaling van die aard en intensiteit van geraas is die neerlegging van aanvaarbare norme nie so 'n groot probleem nie. Dit behoort maklik te wees om regulasies uit te vaardig aangaande die maksimum toelaatbare geraas in verskillende gebiede. Mens besef dat industrieë oor 'n ander kam geskeer sal moet word as privaat individue wat die vrede in die woonbuurtes versteur, en dit sou seker onredelik wees om die spoorweë te probeer dwing om hul lokomotiewe aan té streng vereistes te laat voldoen. Wat egter nodig is is dat sulke beperkings wel ingestel moet word en dan deurgevoer moet word.

Met behulp van spesiale mikrofone is dit vandag moontlik om 'n enkele motor waarvan die knaldemper ontoereikend is uit 'n hele stoet uit te ken en daar is dus geen rede waarom enige oortreder ongestraf moet bly nie. Dit is selfs denkbaar dat bandopnames van die peil van geraas in enige area gemaak kan word om te verseker dat dit nie bo 'n bepaalde vlak uitstyg nie. Sulke maatreëls is dringend noodsaaklik en ons wil die betrokke owerhede graag vra

om die hele aangeleentheid hul intensiewe aandag te skenk.

'n Groot hoeveelheid navorsing i.v.m. die probleem is reeds in ons land gedoen en word nog steeds deur die Buro vir Standaarde onderneem. Ons kan die uitpluising van die detail met veiligheid in die hande van die Buro se Loodskomitee laat. Ook die Departement Beplanning het 'n interdepartementele komitee in die lewe geroep om die probleme verbonde aan die geraas van vliegtuie te ondersoek en hul verslag sal seker eersdaags beskikbaar wees.

Maar op die ou end gaan dit nie wetgewing wees wat die probleem oplos nie. Slegs die voortdurende samewerking van elke enkele individu in die gemeenskap kan verseker dat ons die peil van geraas in ons moderne komplekse samelewing binne verdraagbare perke hou. Dit is noodsaaklik dat ons meer geluid-bewus gemaak word. Baie van die lawaai waarmee ons vandag saam lewe is die gevolg van blote onnadenkendheid, nie van moedswilligheid nie. Omdat ons gewoon geraak het aan die geraas is ons nie meer bewus daarvan hoeveel elkeen van ons daartoe bydra nie. Ons loop luidkeels geselsende saam na ons motors en wanneer 'n knaldemper 'n lekplek ontwikkel laat ons dit eers herstel as die geskikte geleentheid hom bied, gewoonlik wanneer daar ander reparasies gedoen moet word. Die feit dat die lekkende demper 'n bron van irritasie vir ons medemens uitmaak dring al te dikwels glad nie tot ons deur nie. Wie van ons kan met reg sê dat hy of sy nog nooit in 'n vlag van woede, of selfs vir die grap, die motor se toeter met die vuus vasgedruk het nie, totaal ongeag van die ongerief wat hierdie kinderagtige emosionele uiting ander onskuldige mense aandoen?

Die skoolseun op sy kragfiets is wel bewus van die geraas wat die ding maak—maar die moeilikheid is hy is trots daarop. Om hierdie oortreders hok te slaan sal wel in 'n mate help, maar dit is meer belangrik dat hulle opleiding ontvang om te besef watter nadele sulke onnodige lawaaimakery inhou. Die moedswillige belhamels kan mens altyd bykom. Dit is die motorfiets ryer wat salig onbewus van die bohaai wat hy opskop, op sy kragfiets voortsnor, wat tot beter insigte gebring moet word deur middel van spesiale klasse wanneer die omvang van die probleem aan hom verduidelik kan word.

Sommige van die geraas sal ons natuurlik nooit heeltemal kan uitskakel nie. Met groter en groter vliegtuigmotore sal dit al hoe moeiliker word om die geskreeu van spuitvliegtuie te beperk, en selfs met die mees doeltreffende knaldempers sal die gesoem van die toenemende aantal motorkarre altyd met ons wees, maar deur net die volkome onnodige geraas weg te neem sal daar reeds 'n verbasende stilte oor die land toesak.

Ons wil graag aanbeveel dat iedereen wat dit enigins kan bewerkstellig met gereelde tussenposes ergens die veld inry, of desnoods in 'n klankdigte kamer vertoef, om sodoende te kan besef hoeveel agtergrondsgeraas daar in die daaglikse lewe om ons teenwoordig is, want dit is slegs dié bewustheid wat sal sorg dat ons nie wetens of onwetens daartoe bydra nie. Die dowwe gedreun van 'n stad dring eers tot die bewussyn deur as dit eensklaps weggeneem word en daarna is mens, altans 'n tydlang, versigtig om nie te lawaaiert te wees nie.