

VAN DIE REDAKSIE : EDITORIAL

KONGRESSE, SIMPOSIUMS EN KONFERENSIES

Dinge ruk met ons hande uit. Die afgelope 47ste Mediese Kongres wat in Pretoria gehou is, was so 'n groot affêre dat sommige van ons nou nog nie volledig herstel het nie. Om selfs net 'n klein deel van al die referate by te woon is deesdae by 'n kongres 'n rugbrekende taak en die beste waarvoor mens kan hoop is dat jy nie die belangrikste voltallige sittings misloop of die interessantste lesings van die oorsese besoekers vergeet nie. Die handels- en ander uitstallings vereis 'n dag of twee se intensiewe aandag om hulle regtig te kan waardeer en reg te laat geskied aan diegene wat daar heelwat moeite mee gedoen het en geld daaraan spandeer het. Die sosiale funksies is 'n onbegonne taak; as mens hulle almal wil bywoon sal jy met 'n gewelde lewer en bloedbelope oë by die huis aankom.

Is dit nie tyd dat ons halt roep nie en eers weer 'n slag oor die saak dink alvorens ons met die volgende kongres nog verder uitbrei. Dit gaan met ons soos die landbou-toonstellings wat oorspronklik begin het met die vertoon van 'n paar skape en beeste en wat nou alles insluit vanaf koeksisters en ingemaakte vrugte tot elektroniese apparaat. Ons het duidelik ons kinderskoene ontgroei en nou moet ons besluit of ons stewels of pantoffels gaan aantrek.

Dat dit wenslik is dat ons steeds tweejaarliks 'n groot kongres moet hou ly geen twyfel nie. Dit is die een geleentheid wat ons Vereniging het om 'n groot gedeelte van die lede bymekaar te kry en tegelyk te verseker dat daar 'n gevoel van onderlinge samehorigheid tussen die verskillende dissiplines in ons beroep gehandhaaf word. Die luisterryke funksies is belangrik, want dit gee die jonger lede van die Vereniging 'n kans om 'n tradisiebewustheid aan te kweek en met trots hul lidmaatskap te verkondig. Maar die magdom van referate is 'n ander saak. Die verskillende sprekers kan werklik nie verwag dat daar aan hul individuele voorlesings reg sal geskied nie; daar is eenvoudig net te veel. Selfs die publikasie van die referate het 'n groot probleem geword wat ons probeer oplos het deur al die abstrakte te gebruik.

Sou dit nie beter wees om al die sub-sessies te staak en slegs voltallige sittings toe te laat nie? Die verskillende onderafdelings van ons Vereniging hou tog gereeld hul eie simposiums. As daar net iedere môre 'n voltallige sitting sou wees sou die sprekers veel beter verseker kon wees van 'n ontvanklike gehoor; 'n gehoor wat nie reeds half katswink gepraat is nie. Ons wil vanuit hierdie kantoor ruitelik erken dat ons soms gedurende die afgelope kongres stokkies gedraai het. Vlees en bloed kon dit nie staan om al die lesings by te woon nie. Laat ons tweejaarliks 'n paar pertinente onderwerpe kies waarvoor die kongres sal handel en hierdie onderwerpe kan dan terdeë uitgepluis word. Indien daar dan nog 'n paar buitelandse sprekers sou wees wat sterk voel dat hulle 'n woordjie

op die hart of 'n boodskappie oor te dra het, kan ons hulle ook die geleentheid gee, mits hul referate *vooraf* aan 'n keurkomitee voorgelê is en gekeur is. Dieselfde kan geld vir 'n paar gekose sprekers uit ons eie geleedere. Dit help tog nie dat ons kop in die sand steek nie; sommige van die referente by die afgelope kongres het referate gelewer net omdat hulle gevoel het dat dit die ding is wat gedoen moet word, nie omdat hulle belangrike navorsingsmateriaal oor te dra gehad het nie.

Dan kan ons dit aan iedere groep oorlaat om hul eie konferensie of simposium te reël waar hul lede dan almal die geleentheid sal hê om hul sê te sê, want met die kleiner getalle wat by sulke simposiums betrokke is is dit veel makliker om 'n waaksame oog oor kwaliteit en kwantiteit te hou, en daarbenewens is meeste van die ultra-gespesialiseerde lesings tog net interessant en verstaanbaar vir diegene wat daar direk belang by het. Dit is wel waar dat so 'n reëling sal vereis dat meeste van die lede van die Vereniging ten minste een of twee keer per jaar na 'n kongres sal moet gaan, maar eintlik is dit op die oomblik tog reeds so, want ons twyfel of iemand wat die groot kongres bygewoon het sal voel dat dit hom dispensasie gee om sy eie groep se byeenkomste te ignoreer.

Miskien sal ons handelsuitstallings ook so 'n reëling verwelkom, want hulle sal dan seker kan wees dat die kongresgangers wat die groot, tweejaarlikse kongresse bywoon die tyd en energie sal hê om werklik aandag aan die uitstallings te gee. Daarbenewens kan die verskillende firmas dan die kleiner konferensies steun met slegs die apparaat wat vir die betrokke groep van belang is, soos hulle nou reeds dikwels doen.

Verder wil ons graag voorstel dat daar meer werklike simposiums gereël word, waar daar uiters een of twee didaktiese lesings gelewer word en die res van die tyd aan ope paneeldiskussies gewy word. Ons ou nasie is tog al te lief om toesprake te hou en ons dink dat geen funksie van watter aard ook al 'n sukses kan wees sonder dat iemand 'n paar papiere uit sy bladsak haal en 'n spiets afsteek nie. Informele besprekings is dikwels soveel meer werd en al word daar by meeste kongresse wel tyd vir bespreking oopgelaat, is daar weens die langasemkriegerigheid van die referente meestal maar min kans vir werklike oor en weer uitwisseling van gedagtes.

Om op te som: kom ons haal die individuele groepe se sub-sessies uit ons groot kongresse en hou slegs voltallige sittings met 'n paar uitstaande referate by dié geleentheid, en kom ons reël meer ope besprekingsgeleentheid tussen dokters wat mekaar miskien nie aldag te sien kry nie, liewer as om die risiko te loop om tot in die grond in verveel te word deur een of ander langdradige versukkelde spreker. Laat ons bowe alles waak dat ons kongresse vir almal 'n plesier bly en nie 'n nagmerrie word nie.

GALEN

Galen must have been an insufferable fellow. With the exception perhaps of Paracelsus, he was one of the biggest bombasts that our profession has yet produced. Nevertheless, he was an important figure and we cannot afford to negate the valuable knowledge which he gathered or deny the fact that he was streets ahead of his time. At the same time one must admit that he was personally responsible for a period of stagnation in the search for medical knowledge which lasted for more than 1,000 years.

Claudius Galen was born at Pergamon in Asia Minor in AD 138. We have a fairly accurate and full account of his life, for he was a prolific writer and not given to diffidence as far as his own worth and movements were concerned. At an early age, that is before his 30th birthday, he settled in Rome and built up a very large and prosperous practice. He lectured in the public theatre and even did his animal experiments before large and adoring audiences. No doubt the bloodier the better—the Romans were not a squeamish lot. Not surprisingly we learn that he was not adored by his colleagues and that he in turn despised them.

He wrote about 400 books, many of which we have available today. Unfortunately, a number of his works were destroyed in the fire that burned down the Temple of Peace where his library was kept.

The doctrines of Galen may be neatly divided into two camps. On the one hand we find the careful observations of a truly great clinician, a man who was able to carry on in the best Hippocratic tradition, using his experience and his encyclopaedic knowledge. But on the other hand we find the teleologist presenting the speculations of the pure dogmatist, equipped with an overblown opinion of himself and of his scientific infallibility. He was a monotheist and therefore the blue-eyed boy of the Church, especially after Christianity had become established. This clerical support was one of the reasons why the teachings of Galen remained in force for so many centuries. To criticize Galen was tantamount to heresy, and many of his errors were thus perpetuated until well past the Renaissance, in fact virtually up to the 17th century.

This man, who was responsible for the firm establishment of a number of the most fundamental errors, was nevertheless the undisputed father of physiology and possibly even of anatomy, though his tendency to apply his animal observations to man without a moment's reflection did lead him astray in this subject. He was able to distinguish 7 of the 12 pairs of cranial nerves and was familiar with most of the gross anatomy of the human brain as we know it today.

We are also indebted to Galen for the recognition of an important principle: every alteration in function corresponds to an alteration in an organ. But—and the sad part is that when speaking about Galen one has constantly to use a 'but'—his authoritative support of the theory of

'coction' led physicians to believe, even up to the present century, that pus was a good and essential part of the healing process. This ossification of erroneous ideas cannot be wholly ascribed to the influence of Galen. It is unfortunate that very soon after his death the entire civilized world suffered a decline in the spirit of investigation, and even the greatest intellectuals were inclined to believe rather than to think. This strange phenomenon resulted in a breakdown in the critical faculties, which, in turn, ensured that errors could be perpetuated for centuries.

For years the disciples of Galen followed the letter of his teachings rather than their spirit, and, with the sanction of the Church to guard against any heretical attack, it gradually became more and more difficult, and indeed dangerous, to so much as breathe a word of doubt. Galen knew everything and had an answer for every problem. He could cure all diseases and he was not the slave of logical reasoning. In order to establish a fact, it was only necessary for him to say that it was so, and that was that. There could be no arguing. Galen said that there were invisible pores in the septum between the ventricles (a statement which he was obliged to make in order to explain a glaring impossibility in his theory of the circulation—so obvious that even the unenquiring minds of his day could not have missed it) and because he said so, they were there—no arguments. Centuries later this observation was thrown in Harvey's face when he dared to question the validity of the old teachings, and the meticulous dissections of Vesalius were simply brushed aside because they did not agree with the wise utterings of the great master.

One of Galen's teachings we still accept and use today: the concept of diathesis, i.e. that the course or even the presentation of a disease can be altered by the inherent constitutional tendencies of the body. The ancients were very fond of vague, ill-defined concepts, such as the various phlegms of life, and to a certain extent the idea of a specific diathesis is equally nebulous, but it is useful, and for want of a better understanding of body reaction we still believe in it.

Many years after his death the semiphilosophical tendencies of Galen were nicely defined by Goethe when he made Mephistopheles say: *'Immer wo Begriffe fehlen, stellt zur rechten Zeit ein Worst sich ein'*. That is exactly what Galen did. By calling it *pneuma zoticon* (vital spirit) he felt that the problem of what it was that mixed with the blood had been solved, and tenesmus was a diathesis of the large bowel—there was no question about it. Let us be honest: we still have the same tendency today. And we must constantly be on our guard against it.

In this issue we publish the first article in our History of Medicine Series. These will be appearing regularly and readers who possess interesting facts are invited to submit articles.