THE PLACE OF NEUROLOGICAL SURGERY IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM*

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At the time when this Society was founded, 25 years ago, its standards were already so high that they seemed to aspire to the uncompromising perfectionism that characterized the acts and deeds of Harvey Cushing himself throughout his lifetime. However, there were only 30 founding members of the Society, and in the early years the mantle of office fell more frequently on the few shoulders available to receive it. At the present time, with a membership of around 600 and the reputation of being the second oldest, and perhaps the most influential neurological society in the world, it is a very great distinction indeed to be elected to be your President. I cannot fully express my gratitude to you for having so honored me.

There is no magic in the number 25, and basically no more reason to celebrate the 25th anniversary of a wedding or the foundation of a society than the 24th or the 26th. But man has an attraction for round numbers, and the division of time into millennia and centuries somehow satisfies an urge for orderliness that our psychoanalytic confrères may be able to explain. However, since none of us expects to survive a hundred years, we have accepted the common practice of dividing them into convenient fractions such as one half or one fourth. Thus we find ourselves today at a universally recognized milestone, our silver anniversary. Your Program Committee has taken cognizance of this by the beautiful cover design, and our dearly beloved Historian, Louise Eisenhardt, will undoubtedly review the achievements of the Society during its eventful existence, later on. What I should like to do, with perhaps only an occasional glance backward, is to evaluate the place of neurosurgery today as a teaching discipline to medical students.

The problem of the place of neurosurgery in the undergraduate curriculum is simply symbolic of the same problem that confronts any of the surgical specialties, or indeed all the minor and even the major disciplines. Up to 15 or 20 years ago the development of a new specialty received recognition in medical schools by the establishment of a new department, the appointment of a professor, and the allocation of a block of hours in the curriculum, which then appeared to have unlimited elasticity.

The time has been reached, however, when the expanding body of knowledge can no longer be incorporated into our teaching by the simple device of...
stuffing more facts into the same skin. As Darley\textsuperscript{2} put it:

"Limitations upon the human intellectual capacity preclude the addition of much more curricular material without adding to the time now currently required and limitations upon the human span of usefulness make it unreasonable to cut further into one's potential years of professional service."

The practical pedagogical problem, therefore, is as President Pusey\textsuperscript{3} put it:

"How effectively to handle increasing masses of information? And more difficult: How to achieve wholeness of understanding in the face of fantastic growth in the amount to be known?"

The new approach is to give up the struggle to make each medical student into a specialist in every field of medical endeavor within the undergraduate span of four years. Rather, the effort is now made to help him build a solid foundation upon which he himself will erect the superstructure. This can be done by teaching him not so much the facts, as the way to acquire them; helping him to establish good habits of work; leading him to develop solid attitudes and proper understanding of professional and ethical principles.

It is within this framework that I would like to develop my theme.

About a year ago, in anticipation of setting up a teaching program at a new medical school, I circularized most of the members of this Society who were heads of neurosurgical divisions or departments at other schools for their opinions concerning the place of the neurosurgeon in the medical school faculty, and the place of neurosurgery in the undergraduate medical curriculum. I also asked each of you, to whom I wrote, whether the practical working-out of the existing program at your school meets your ideas completely, or whether, if you could, you would change it to approach more closely your philosophical concept of teaching neurosurgery to undergraduates. In response to the latter, Bill Van Wagenen, with his usual caustic wit, reminded me of one definition of philosophy as: "The refined, learned art of ignoring fact and going wrong with confidence." Nevertheless, he and most of the others took the trouble to present me with not only the details of their own programs, but their very valuable reflections on what we are trying to accomplish and how far we are succeeding in connection with this problem.

I have received replies from the following members: Eben Alexander, Jr.; Percival Bailey; E. Harry Botterell; Jefferson Browder; Paul C. Buycy; the late Eldridge Campbell; Loyal Davis; Arthur Ecker; Edgar Fincher; William J. German; Francis C. Grant; Robert Groff; Wallace B. Hamby; Thomas I. Hoen; Sir Geoffrey Jefferson; Edgar A. Kahn; Kenneth G. McKenzie; John M. Meredith; W. Jason Mixter; Howard C. Naftziger; Eric Oldberg; Herbert Olivecrona; Carl W. Rand; Theodore Rasmussen; Bronson S. Ray; Frederick L. Reichert; Ernest Sachs; Michael Scott; R. Glen Spurling; Frank Turnbull; William P. Van Wagenen; A. Earl Walker; Arthur A. Ward, Jr.; James C. White; and Barnes Woodhall. This occasion presents me with an opportunity to thank each of you for the trouble you