



NINETY YEARS AGO, MAY 1921

Dr. Robert B. Greenough discusses the value of radium in the treatment of disease, and notes that despite ten years of availability in the US, there exists still an uncertainty among surgeons and physicians as to its value in the treatment of disease. While at one point the general public greeting radium as a “magical element” its actual use has yielded disappointing results, but at the same time medical professionals have gained greater knowledge of its uses and advantages. While pointing out the scarcity of radium, Dr. Greenough continues by enumerating some of its successful applications in laboratory testing, diagnostic imagery, and the inhibition of cancerous growth.

In response to Dr. Greenough, Dr. Isaac Gerber expresses his own experience with radium instilling “a very, though not altogether pessimistic attitude towards cancer.” Dr. Gerber feels that eventually the use of radium will not be in the field of cancer, but in the treatment of various benign lesions.

An editorial notes an increase in the number of specialists, and that the field of specialism has been divided up more and more. As a result, general practitioners may find it more difficult to maintain a place in the community. “If the modern trend toward extreme specialism is allowed to continue, the general practitioner will disappear. This would be a calamity...” the writer goes on to say that both specialists and general practitioners are essential in the present development of civilization, and that a means should be found to preserve the two. The Council of Medical Education proposes a remedy in which medical curriculums vow to develop general practitioners, and that specialties be made part of a post-graduate teaching, and that there be established certain standards for specialists so that when a patient pays an extra fee, they are sure that the fee represents special knowledge that the recipient has gained by extra time spent in perfecting their special subject.

FIFTY YEARS AGO, MAY 1961

This issue opened with a discussion on the nature of the country’s social security program and the various distortions and misrepresentations being presented to the American people. The author quotes an article by Ray M. Peterson, vice president and associate actuary of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States appearing in the April 8 issue of JAMA which declares that: 1.) the public is being given the false impression about the financing of the soecial security program, 2.) the program has been misrepresented as a “time-tested” and “tried and proved” system of financing old-age benefits, and 3.) that people are under the mistaken impression that benefits are being paid out of reserves rather than an almost-entirely pay-as-you-go system. The author points out that under private insurance, all money paid into the insurance fund together with all income from investment is enough to cover all promised or guaranteed benefits. The piece closes with,

“Will the youngsters of the future protest what the oldsters of this generation have voted for themselves? During the decade ahead, will we oldsters, as we seek to enjoy our social security benefits, hear a rising clamor of unfairness—a din of inequity?”

Dr. Mark D. Altschule writes about biochemical aspects of psychiatry. In particular, he attempts to relate the clinical effects of some of the reently introduced drugs for mental and emotional disorders to their actions on brain amines and on some of their derivatives.

Banice M. Webber, MD, Leland W. Jones, MD, and Joan Dockery, RN, look at experiences with human tumor vaccines. Noting that for over fifty years, investigators in cancer therapy have been exploring the possible application of immune mechanisms to the treatment of this group of diseases. Attempts to immunize an individual against their own tumor have been based on the hypothesis that a tumor is in some way antigenetically different from the host and that the host resistance can be increased. They conclude that while results have not been dramatic, their experiences warrant further trials, particularly in combination with X-ray therapy.

Within the editorial section, a letter is reprinted from the Pawtucket Times under the heading “Socialism and Medical Care.” It begins: “Proponents of the proposal to provide federal medical ait to everyone over 65 receiving benefits under social security deny their program would be an opening wedge to socialized medicine. The Socialist part of the United States apparently thinks otherwise.”

In a short note to lexicographers, the identical meanings of “flammable” and “inflammable” are pointed out. The World Health Organizaztion recognizes that language is full of opposites such as formal and informal, decent and indecent, and capable and incapable. With that in mind the WHO recommends flammable with an opposite non-flammable.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, MAY 1986

Dianne N. Abuelo, MD, Judith Rosenstein, BA, MT, and Michael Sheff, PhD bring up the subject of Tay-Sachs disease, a fatal neuro-degenerative disorder transmitted by a pair of autosomal recessive genes. A recent decline in incidence among the Jewish population of the United States is attributed to extensive efforts in community education and heterozygote screening. Premarital rabbincal counseling provides the ideal opportunity to encourage screening.

Under “Have You Heard?”, state licensing boards will be alerted by the American Medical Association when physicians have licensure actions taken against them in other states. Elsewhere, it’s noted that air guns that fire pellets had usually been considered dangerous only to unprotected eyes, that pellets can also penetrate the abdomen and require surgical removal.