NineTY Years AGo, August, 1921

Paul Appleton, MD, offers a piece entitled “Obstetrics—A Two-Man Job” in which he draws a comparison between surgeons requiring the help of anesthetists and an assistant, and obstetricians who, given the range of stress and risks their patients experience, could likewise benefit from more than one set of trained hands. Appleton asks how much respect one would have for a surgeon who relied upon the sole help of an experienced nurse of well-wishing neighbor. He goes on to draw similar comparisons with plumbers and electricians. He takes his argument a step further by challenging the reader to name a more difficult surgical problem requiring deftness, judgment, and rapid action than a case of surgical obstetrics. Appleton urges that for responsible safety, two obstetricians should be present for a patient. He points out that the duties of the obstetric assistant would be just as well-defined as those of a well-trained surgical assistant. Adopting the practice of two obstetricians, Appleton says, will bring good results and a lower mortality rate.

A nationwide “save your sight” campaign was conducted by the recently-organized Eye Sight Conservation Council to acquaint the public with the importance of eye care and to urge the universal eye examinations of school children, workers in industry, and clerks in stores and offices. Special literature was sent to teachers and employers. Schools and factories received charts and posters visualizing eye care, depicting the advantages of correcting ocular defects, and warning against eye strain and its “attending evils.”

An editorial criticizes over-reliance on specialization, citing a case in which an elderly man of ill health, after having his history taken down, is sent to a succession of physicians for various tests over the course of several days, during which his health deteriorated further. The writer goes on to wax poetic on days of the “good old family doctor,” who, in his big-hearted, even if superficial and inefficient manner, would have calmed all fears, and put the patent at rest in mind and body, having carried out the treatment perhaps as effectively, if less accurately.

Fifty Years Ago, August 1961

Walter E. Barton, MD, presents the Tenth Arthur Hiler Ruggles Oration: Action for Mental Health in which they honor and praise the work of Arthur Ruggles and his achievements with Butler Hospital. Various programs instituted meant that: patients who had previously been considered hopeless could now find rehabilitation. Chronically ill mental patients could be motivated toward a more active social role. Improving self-esteem among patients, and creating positive atmospheres which result in stronger patients with greater chances of improvement.

A.A. Savastano, MD, looks at being a medical witness in court, noting that there is little preparation for this role in medical training. He points out that if a physician accepts cases based on personal injury or compensation, they are legally obligated to appear in court. By that same token, it is important for the attorney to make sure that the physician is given plenty of fair notice prior to a court appearance in which to get notes in order and to arrange his schedule. Savastano underscores the importance of medical records, and with disclosing all injuries sustained—not just the major injuries. No detail should be considered too trivial. While on the stand, a witness should be presentable, well and clear-spoken, unpretentious, courteous, direct, accessible, and, most of all, fully aware that they are testifying under oath.

An editorial makes mention of a special commission of the Rhode Island legislation discussing underground installation of utility lines. Due to the frequency of downed power and telephone lines during storms, the author is wholly supportive of the plan to put important lines of communication out of harm’s way and wishes the special commission the best of luck.

The American Medical Association stresses the need for teachers and other school personnel to receive regular medical checkups. This would not only aid in preventing the spread of disease, but also help maintain the supply in the manpower-short teaching profession.

Twenty-Five Years Ago, August 1986

Joseph Friedman, MD, continues his look at recent research advances in Parkinson’s disease. He notes that the discovery of 1 methyl-4-phenyl-1,2,3,6 tetrahydropyridine (MPTP) has led to an increase in Parkinson’s disease research with a hope for improved treatments and understanding of the disease. He also takes a look at the promising research being done with brain implants.

This issue presents a special report on missing and exploited children and offers some eye-opening figures as far as the number of missing children is concerned, and the varying forms of exploitation. In addition to legislative initiatives and national programs to help curb the problem of missing and exploited children, the piece reports on health—physical and mental—problems and injuries often found among runaway and homeless youth, abducted children, and sexually exploited children, and the role of the physician. The report goes on to talk about prevention, research issues, educational opportunities, and other activities and organizations. Physicians and other health care professionals can play a role in helping alleviate the problem.

Air bags are becoming available as an option in new cars and it is recommended that they be used in addition to lap-and-shoulder safety belts.