

CURRENT COMMENT

Anyone who studies the published Proceedings of the International Congresses of Dermatology in Washington and in Munich will be impressed by the breadth and vigor of our specialty. Despite the wide range in quality, many of the reports and exhibits were splendid scientific and wide range in quality, many of the reports and exhibits were splendid scientific and clinical contributions. Nevertheless, there is no denying the accuracy of many statements in the "Current Comment" entitled "The International Congress" (*J. Invest. Derm.*, 52: 6, 549 (June) 1969). As the author states, the International Committee of Dermatology has for many years been fully aware of the shortcomings of the Congresses and has done its best to remedy them. The present International Committee has, at its recent meetings, taken into careful consideration the many valuable suggestions which have appeared in print and been submitted by letter. In consonance with these suggestions, the Organizing Committee of the Venice-Padua Congress, 21 to 27 May, 1972 is planning to have only four or five themes and about eight symposia. These will review subjects useful to all practitioners in the specialty. In addition, it is proposed to have twenty to thirty small discussion groups or workshops presided over by authorities in basic sciences and technical fields and dealing with such fundamental subjects as sweat, sebum, melanin, keratin, electronmicroscopy, photobiology, immuno-biology, biostatistics, aging of the skin, dermatologic education, to name a few. The small workshops will be conducted as round tables where panels of experts will spend as much time as necessary to discuss the advances in their special fields. These sessions will be open to any who wish to attend as listeners and to submit questions. In addition, there will be exhibits, case presentations (live and on television) and demonstrations of tools to help dermatologists teach. The International Committee and the Organizing Committee of the XIV Congress are seeking advice from all National Societies in selecting topics and speakers and in planning this Congress. As always, the aim is to organize the Congress so that it will be rewarding both to basic scientists and to teachers and practitioners of our specialty.

Despite the undeniable truths and thought-provoking questions in June's "Current Comment" there seems to be some important omissions. For example, the anonymous author did not mention the all-important fact that about two-thirds of those attending International Congresses of Dermatology are not laboratory workers, scientific investigators or academicians, but practitioners of the specialty. This is a fact that must be given full consideration by the planners of our Congresses.

Are these practitioners, who probably take care of most dermatology patients throughout the world, to be denied the advantage of comparing notes and results with their fellow practitioners from other countries every five years? Are they to be denied periodic opportunities to see, hear and meet the great investigators and teachers whose works they know through reading? Are young and older dermatologists henceforth to be deprived the mnemotechnical aid of associating the names they read in print with the memory that this expert on keratinization is lean and sallow; this dermat-immunologist is humorous and smiling; this dermogeneticist is huge; this melanocytologist is small, dark and lean; this scientist is quick and volatile and that one is slow and deliberate; and this famous man chews cherries and spits out the pits while presiding?

Are the thousands of practicing dermatologists of the world, some of them in countries where it is difficult to obtain travel funds, henceforth to be barred from international meetings just because they do not qualify for meetings devoted purely to such basic subjects as biochemistry, collagen, or gamma globulins?

And should the laboratory scientists, investigators and academicians not share what they have acquired from their own investigations, reading and workshops by teaching in simple language those portions of their scientific disciplines they judge to be of value to their practicing colleagues?

And who would be so short-sighted as to deny the women their right to belong to the international world of their husbands' profession, to make and renew friendships with the wives and families of their husband's colleagues, to see the

museums, the homes, the cities, the people of the host countries of International Congresses?

In this sad world of actual or threatened strife between nations, it is a negligible thing that the dermatologists of all nations are able to meet each other in the flesh once every five years—Arab, Egyptian and Israeli, Latin, Scandinavian and Slav, practicing physicians from both sides of every political curtain, in friendly communication and on a common endeavor for humanity and medicine?

Is it entirely useless to have the dermatologists of the world given the opportunity to see the magnificent sculpture of a Sabouraud; the sculpture and paintings of fellow dermatologists, contemporary and past? Is it not worthwhile to be invited to attend operas, concerts and plays, often in the very countries in which the composers, authors and artists worked and lived; and sometimes to special performances in the very theatres and halls which saw the premières of their masterpieces?

Finally, is the anonymous author so unaware of human nature and economic principles that he believes that the dermatologists of the world, that the cities, countries, states, associations, industrial organizations and individuals who

have contributed his conservatively estimated over \$2,000,000 every five years, would give anything like this sum for any other purpose than to host and attend an International Congress? Does he seriously predict that they would, as he suggests, contribute an equivalent sum for fellowships in dermatology, from which each contributor could scarcely expect any direct profit, any direct acquisition of knowledge or any pleasure and broadening experience?

It is certainly worthwhile, once every five years, to give all dermatologists a chance to look at their specialty as a whole, in all its splendid breadth and depth, as a dynamic and living, complex, diversified but integrated effort to better the lot of man by alleviating or mastering skin and venereal diseases. If this is not worthwhile, then the dermatologists of the world will cease to give their International Congresses the magnificent support, the time, effort and money they have always donated so generously in the past. When that moment comes the International Congress will indeed have outlived its usefulness; and perhaps our specialty, fragmented and divided, will have done likewise.

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