

CANCER CONTROL

When I was a boy I derived my greatest joy from the reading of stories having to do with mysteries of the unknown and the invisible. One such story in particular thrilled me with the most exquisite horror. The hero of this narrative would awake at about midnight and look up at the ceiling where, he felt somehow that somebody was hanging on the gas fixtures. He had this unearthly sensation many a warm night but paid it no heed since it really was not causing him any real harm and, yes, it might be just his imagination. But one night, the "something" fell on him heavily and immediately proceeded to smother him to death.

I can never think of cancer without bringing to mind the above story. Cancer starts like most of the most deadly things we know of: insidiously and painlessly. There is very little if any trouble with a little lump somewhere on our anatomical landscape and, if not very conspicuous, why bother about it? Thus the victim does not mind it very much and hardly ever considers cancer as a possibility because somehow, although he has heard of cancer starting that way, he regards himself as immune to such a loathsome and to him rare affection. Somehow we think of cancer as an entity which exists, no doubt, but is somehow foreign to our own body. Who in this room figures on having cancer? Not very many think that it is at all possible. But, as one of our tutors puts it, "May I present a few figures?"

- (1) Of people who die after 40 years of age, ONE out of every TEN dies of cancer.

According to that, if things do not change, about five of us in this very room will succumb to the influence of those lawlessly growing cells which we see up in the pathology laboratory.

- (2) As a cause of death from any cause, cancer comes next only to Tuberculosis and infantile diseases, while in some states it has even outstripped tuberculosis itself.

Pick up any copy of the News or other paper giving the deaths in this city. There among fifteen enumerated causes of death you will find 3 or 4 as due to cancer.

- (3) Whereas 90,000 soldiers were killed in two years of fighting in the recent war; cancer did away with 200,000 in the same time.

Not so bad for cancer, is it? Especially not if we stop to think that the war has been over for some time while the cancer death rate is increasing steadily year by year.

The very fact that cancer usually takes away from the world those that are over forty years old is quite an important factor in itself both economically and socially. Economically, we lose a lot by the death of a person who has had the experience of forty years of living; socially, most of our dearly beloved are forty and over. Naturally our fathers and mothers fall into this last group.

It was not long ago when the popular idea of cancer was that of a mysterious, dark, dreaded affliction from which no escape was possible. It was regarded similar to Jiu-Jitsu and Spiritualism in its mystery and to, well, there's nothing but Fate itself to compare its inevitability. If you had a cancer you had a limited, a very limited, time to live. You were as good as in the grave: you were doomed. Perhaps you remember hearing such conversation:

"Did you hear what the doctor found on Brown?"
"No-what?"
"Don't tell nobody. Listen, he's got CANCER!"
"Goodnight. Is that so? What's gonna become of his widow?"

Then again there existed the very popular idea that cancer per se was inoperable or if operable it usually made matters a lot worse. It is not hard to find a cause for this mode of thinking. Since every one dreaded cancer and knew that there was little hope for its cure no one thought of having the growth removed before unbearable pain, disfiguration or odor prompted the individual to take a chance, and see a surgeon. Naturally the case was inoperable or on the border line. If operation was done it did nothing but stir up metastases and bring about speedier death in many cases, more so when we consider the poor operating technic then employed. Of these hopeless and disastrous ending cases the public heard much about. But if an early case was operated on successfully with a cure, nobody ever heard anything about it. Who, under the feeling of the times, would go advertising the fact that they had had cancer when it was thout to be hereditary, contagious and what-not? Nobody! And nobody did tell about a cancer cure unless it was the surgeon speaking to other physicians.

I hope that I am not conveying the impression that all this was a matter of years ago and that nowadays every lay man or woman will consult a doctor on the first appearance of a suspicious growth or symptom. Such is far from the fact, many people still feel that: "If it's cancer, let me die a natural death and not be cut up and die in the hospital."

But people now are much better educated in matters pertaining to cancer than they were 10 years ago. A lot of the horror and mystery has been dispelled from the thought of cancer; much of the humbug and uncertainty has been conquered concerning its treatment, and withal - a brighter outlook lies ahead. I say "ahead" advisedly because even with this improvement in the public's education the cancer death rate is steadily and truly increasing.

With these facts as to the condition of things ten years ago and even now, it can be seen, without much trouble, that what was urgently needed was some agency which would educate the public ~~the public~~ to realize that the only hope and a good one at that, in cases of cancer was EARLY diagnosis and treatment. New methods of diagnosing cancer might be found by research laboratories as well as new methods of treatment; but, as long as the average person did not seek aid in time if at all, nothing would ever come of them. What was urgently needed then was education to the effect that cancer is curable if dealt with on time; that it is not a hereditary disease; and is not transmissible by contact, or in any known way.

In May 1913, at New York City, a group of physicians and surgeons, realizing the need for just such education, organized a society similar to the National Tuberculosis Association, and named it The American Society for the Control of Cancer. This newly formed society evidently hit the nail on the head for it was not long before every worth while medical organization in the United States officially approved the new society.

This society is supported by membership dues and does not aim to go into cancer research or support any hospital or institution its purpose is clearly defined in its motto:

"To disseminate knowledge concerning the symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, to investigate the conditions under which cancer is found and to compile statistics in regard thereto."

Please notice that it does not intend to do a thousand and one things as many new societies have a tendency to promise to do but that all it intends to accomplish is: "To disseminate knowledge" so that the public will know when to go to a doctor on suspicion of cancer; so that the doctor will know the best ways and safest ways to diagnose and treat cancer; and, finally to give everybody figures as to the occurrence of cancer: "the conditions under which it is found."

In the ten years of its existense, The Cancer Control Society has **strictly** and enthusiastically adhered to its stated purpose. Every state in the union now has a local chapter of the national organization, and almost every American city of any size has a Cancer Control Committee the whole machinery working as one and none encroaching upon the work of the other. As a result pamphlets have been distributed to physicians concerning cancer diagnosis and treatment, circulars posters and whatnot have been placed where the ordinary person can get at them and every so often an intensified campaign is conducted to jar people's senses so that they will not forget the slow, painless, insidious death reaper: cancer.

Cancer Week is the time set aside by the American Cancer Control Society when this intensified form of cancer education is conducted. It is a national affair and is conducted with great consideration for those small things which make or unmake any movement. The president of the organization talked fifteen minutes from one of the most powerful Eastern radio broadcasting stations in existence and many other heads of state and city affiliated committees did the same thing in their territory. A standard lecture was prepared and distributed to doctors to be read at cancer meetings, or if the doctors were too busy or could not cover all the territory they coached their wives who in turn broadcasted the lecture all over town. One doctor flew by airplane from one countryside to another teaching the gospel of cancer control and being guided in his flight by white signs painted on the barn roofs of his patients. Short moving pictures such as "The Reward of Courage" were shown everywhere telling the story of cancer control. Clinics were held in all the large cities with cancer lectures, cancer demonstrations and cancer operations. It was hard to turn in any direction without having cancer education forced upon one either by voice, by writing or by ether waves. Even the preachers preached about it. Certainly it was, that no stone was left unturned.

Usually, after an explosive campaign as the above, a society somehow fades away into some sort of oblivion for a considerable period of time. Not so with the Cancer Control Society. As in palpating for abdominal tumors it applied the principle of "hold what you gain" and continued and is now conducting the **same** never tiring educational campaign as it did in the beginning. There remains no doubt as to its success.

People are beginning to realize that perhaps cancer can be cured if gotten early enough and many more people are consulting advice as to precancerous lesions than ever before. The mystery and hoodoo of cancer is also slowly fading away and it only remains to be hoped that such good work will be kept up and that there will be a material decrease in the next cancer mortality statistics.

CONCLUSION

There is a national society known as the Cancer Control Society in the United States which, together with its infinite subdivisions is effectively disseminating knowlegde and educating both physician and lay man as to what best to do with cancer. Such education, as has been the case with tuberculosis, will surely be the big and important factor in reducing the cancer mortality.

References:

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