

REPRINT.**THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONS BETWEEN PHYSICIANS AND
MEDICAL JOURNALS.***By **BURNSIDE FOSTER, M. D.,**Editor **St. Paul Medical Journal, St. Paul, Minn.**

Probably no one who has given thought to the subject will deny that there are too many medical journals published in the United States, and yet it is not likely that any two persons would agree as to which ones should be stricken from the list as superfluous and unnecessary. I propose to discuss briefly the subject of medical journalism, the relation of the medical journal to the practitioner of medicine and the duty which, it seems to me, the physician owes to medical journals. There is no physician in active practice, no matter whether he lives in a large city or practices alone in some isolated community, who does not need to be kept in touch with the world of medicine, and he can only do this by means of medical journals. The weekly journal is the most popular and is the most valuable, and there are few physicians who cannot afford two weekly journals. The Journal of the American Medical Association should be received by every physician in America; as a matter of fact it is received by about one-tenth of them. The cost of this journal should not be charged to the medical journal expense account, since it seems to me that five dollars a year is little enough to pay for the privilege of membership in the American Medical Association, and the journal is sent to every member who pays his annual dues. In the Journal of the American Medical Association, the physician not only finds an account of all that takes place at the annual meetings with the full text of all the papers that are read there, some good, some to be sure, bad, and some of indifferent merit, but he finds the reports of numerous important medical societies which meet at various times and in various places during the year, a considerable number of important articles written especially for the journal, much good editorial discussion of the burning medical questions of the day, and an excellent digest of the current medical literature of the world as well as interesting medical news items from different parts of the country, reviews of recently published medical books and correspondence from different sources concerning medical questions of interest, the whole being completely and exhaustively indexed at the end of each volume. All this the physician gets each week as one of the privileges of membership in the American Medical Association. In addition

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to the journal of the Association, the writer believes that there are very few physicians who cannot afford one other weekly medical journal. There are a number to select from, each having something to commend it, and while it is not my purpose to make any invidious comparisons, it is my own strong conviction that the journal whose ownership is divorced from all outside business interests, and which is largely managed and controlled by medical men, is the one which most deserves and which will best repay their support. Such a journal can fearlessly discuss and expose the schemes which are, and which always will be, from time to time devised for the furtherance of individual interests at the expense of the good name of Medicine. Having two weekly medical journals, it might seem that the average medical man, especially if he felt obliged to figure his expenses closely, as which of us does not? was well supplied. So he is well supplied, and if his only object is to keep in touch with the general world of medicine, he may perhaps stop with his weekly journals. The physician who does not live in or near one of the great medical centers where the medical weeklies are published, feels or should feel, another need which it is the function of medical journalism to supply. This need, and a most important one it is, is to keep in touch with the profession of his own neighborhood; nearly every county has its own medical society, every county which has physicians enough to organize one, should have its own medical society, and there are numerous other local medical societies, and every state should have its own medical journal, which should have as one of its most important objects the placing on record of the doings of the various local medical societies and the publishing of the more important papers read before them. Such a journal if well conducted should receive the support of the whole profession of the state. The ideal plan would be for the state medical society to own and publish the journal and have it occupy the same relation to the medical profession of the state as the Journal of the American Medical Association occupies to the medical profession of the country. Where there are a number of rival medical journals in the same state, it is the duty of each physician to ascertain the best one, usually an easy task, and give that one his earnest support. In return for this support what does the medical journal owe to its subscribers? It owes them the prompt publication of all medical society reports and notices, whenever such are furnished in proper season by the secretaries of these societies; and here let me say, in passing, that these societies should insist upon their secretaries sending reports of their meetings, regularly to at least one of the journals published in the state. It owes them an active support in all matters pertaining to medical organization and medical legislation for the suppression of quackery, and for the regulation of medical practice. It owes them a fair, honest and discriminating review of all new medical books, by men competent to write such reviews, so that its readers may know which of the new books it will pay them

to buy, and which ones to avoid buying. A most valuable feature of the local medical journal, and one which cannot fail to be of great service to its subscribers if the work is well done, is the abstracting of the important contributions to the different departments of medicine and surgery, taken from current journals which its readers are, for the most part, not likely to have access to.

The local medical journal has a very important part to play in the uniting and organizing and holding together the members of the medical profession in its own territory, in voicing their sentiments on all matters of general interest to the profession and also in bringing the medical men of different parts of the country into closer touch with each other. Many an important contribution to medical literature has been made in a paper read before some little known local medical society, which would perhaps never have been printed had not the editor of the local medical journal pursued its author until he was finally induced to put his manuscript into shape for printing and send it in for publication. Many rare and important clinical observations are recorded in the local journals, which, were it not for the existence of these journals would never be recorded. Such papers and clinical reports frequently give rise to correspondence between medical men in different parts of the country and form the starting point of pleasant and valuable friendship between physicians who might otherwise have never known each other.

The local medical journal is a perfectly legitimate and a convenient medium by means of which those who are engaged in certain special lines of practice may make themselves and their work known to the profession of the state, either by means of papers and case reports, or by means of a standing card in the advertising pages of the journal. This latter method has never found favor in this part of the country, although in many places it is a common practice and there can be no ethical or other objection to it.

The local medical journal owes something to its subscribers in regard to the advertising contracts which it accepts and it certainly owes it to its subscribers not to sell to its advertisers a line of its reading pages. It is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between those advertisements which it is proper to admit and those which it is not; there will always be certain preparations concerning which opinions will differ. I believe all will agree that preparations of unknown composition should not be admitted. There can, however, be but one opinion on the subject of printing as original articles or as editorials, matter which is furnished by the advertiser concerning his preparations. This, it seems to me is the lowest form of prostitution of which a medical journal can be guilty. The subscribers to a medical journal, certainly have a right to demand that what they are given to read shall represent the honest and sincere convictions of the contributors to, or the editor of the journal, and not advertisements disguised as reading matter.

If the local medical journal honestly strives to perform its duty to its subscribers as I have outlined it, and to be in all respects loyal to the best interests of the medical profession, it surely has a right to expect something in return from the medical men in its legitimate territory. It should receive their subscriptions with prompt annual payment of the same. It should receive their support in the various ways which will help to make the journal prosperous and successful. Every physician has from time to time interesting and unusual clinical experiences which should be placed on record, and the writing out of which takes but a very short time. Medical journals are always eager to receive these clinical reports and they are often more interesting and valuable to their readers than the longer and more elaborate papers. Medical men can assist the medical journals very materially by reporting their interesting cases more frequently than they do and they will find that the doing so is of both direct and indirect advantage to themselves in various ways. It is not only the successful diagnosed and treated cases that should be reported, but the failures and mistakes should also be recorded, the latter being often more valuable than the former. The readers of a medical journal may also be of great service to the editor, and add much to the value and interest of the journal, by giving him editorial suggestions from time to time. A medical editor, if his heart is in his work, desires to so conduct his journal that it will reflect the best thought on all important medical questions, not only of general but also of local interest. Many subjects must from time to time suggest themselves to the readers of the journal which have not occurred to the editor and the discussion of which would be of interest and of value. Physicians would confer a real favor upon the editors, at least upon some editors, by corresponding with them occasionally upon the editorial management of their journal. Letters to the editor, for publication, upon subjects either of local or of general medical interest are always gladly received and show a friendly interest in the journal, which is always pleasant to the editor.

Another thing which medical men owe to the good medical journals is, not only to refuse to support, but to do all in their power to discountenance the poor ones. There are a large number of cheap medical journals, usually owned and managed by persons having no interest in the medical profession, which are conducted solely for the purpose of making money and whose editorial and reading pages are for sale to the highest bidder. The pages of these journals are usually filled with so-called original articles which are furnished by their advertisers, and which consist for the most part of spurious case reports of patients said to have been cured by this or that proprietary or patent medicine. These journals usually have a large circulation, because, having practically no bona fide subscription list, they are mailed to physicians whose names are taken at random from the medical directory, and they can

make their circulation as large as they desire. Such journals are not only a blot on medical journalism, but they are distinctly detrimental to the interests of scientific medicine, and should be repudiated and discountenanced by all decent physicians.

Medical journalism as a whole can be, and should be, moulded by the medical profession as a whole, and if medical men would give a little more thought to the matter they could easily eliminate the bad journals and maintain and improve the good ones. If every physician who has at heart the best interests of his profession, and of scientific medicine, would look carefully into the subject of medical journalism and having thoroughly surveyed the field would subscribe only to those journals which appeal to him as being substantial, clean, honest and well conducted, and would not only refuse to subscribe to, but would refuse to support in any way, those journals which are either owned by or which pander to commercial enterprises whose only object is to make money out of the medical profession, we would have fewer and much better journals.