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President's Message

What Medicine Advertised One Hundred Years Ago



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LAST SUMMER, the California Medical Association asked our museum curator, Dr. Bob LaPerriere, if we wanted to take over its bound collection of the *Western Medical Journal*, dating back to 1904. His reply: an enthusiastic "yes!"

What was different here, however, was that the advertising pages were included in each bound volume. This gave us a valuable source to review what medicine advertised about 100 years ago. This report is based on just 10 years - the journals from 1904-1914 - a decade of profound changes in our state's scientific, cultural and ethical values.

Sanitoriums

Private sanitoriums were big advertisers then, and several took out half-page ads for years. By far, the biggest of these was the California Sanatorium, located on 42 acres in Belmont on the San Francisco Peninsula. Its mission was dedicated to "the Scientific Treatment of Tuberculosis," and ads included several pages of photographs of the facility. The cost for a patient's confinement began at "\$25 a week, including medicines and medical attendance." Other sanitoriums were established for nervousness and psychiatric problems, and for addictions to alcohol or drugs. Together, their volume was so large that sanatorium ads alone could have been said to have underwritten the cost of the journal.

Hospitals

Hospitals also advertised, and it is apparent that the definition of a "hospital" varied considerably. There were a surprisingly large number of such institutions in proportion to the population. One reason was that almost every ethnic group seemed to want a hospital of its own, so there was a German, French, Italian, and Chinese hospital in San Francisco. Some hospitals were small, 25 beds or less, and managed by a roster of nurses under the charge of a single doctor/owner. Others were up-to-date facilities with more than 100 beds and boasting a roster of prominent doctors.

While some no longer exist, e.g., the Wentworth Hospital in Sacramento, others were the nidus of an institution that has since prospered and grown. These include: St. Francis, St. Luke's, Polyclinic, Lane Hospital and Cooper Medical College, all in San Francisco. (These latter two eventually became part of Stanford University Medical School.) Also, there were Good Samaritan, the University of Southern California College of Medicine and Pacific Hospitals, all in Los Angeles, and Mater Misericordiae Hospital (Mercy Hospital) in Sacramento. (Mercy advertised that a post partum hospitalization for one week cost \$25.)

Railroads

Next in importance, at least from the size and frequency of the ads, were the railroads. Their considerable power on the economy was shown by their full-page ads. Southern Pacific boasted how one could get to Chicago in 68 hours for \$72.50 while riding in luxurious electric-lighted cars. The rail trip to New York from San Francisco cost \$108.50, which was the same fare on an alternate southern route, taking S.P. to New Orleans, and from there to New York on a "luxury steamer."

Diseases

Infectious disease was the most frequent killer of the time. New helpful discoveries seemed to fire up the imaginations of physician advertisers as well as those for chemists and pharmacists.¹ Tuberculosis, "the white man's plague," was one of the most lethal infections of this time, second only to influenza/pneumonia (the two were grouped as one disease then).² In 1882, Robert Koch discovered the mycobacterium that caused it. Sanatoriums provided the dual function of isolating the infected patient from the general population and providing rest, uncontaminated air, and fine nutrition which, in combination, was demonstrated to encourage healing. Soon after the radiation machine was invented by Wilhelm von Roentgen in 1895, X-rays of lungs allowed physicians to follow a patient's progress. Immediately, doctors with little training bought X-ray machines and advertised for patients.

Diphtheria and Typhoid Fever were two diseases for which vaccines were not yet invented.³ However antitoxins were available. In volume 6 (1908), Parke, Davis & Co. and the Cutter Laboratory in Berkeley each took out full-page ads for anti-diphtheric serum and anti-diphtheric globulins which were used in patients (usually children) with the disease. In 1911, after the US Army was vaccinated against typhoid, this therapy was available to the public. In vol. 9 (1911), an ad by the Cutter Laboratory brought attention to a baseball hero, Heine Heitmiller, who died at age 28 of typhoid. (**Photo:Heine**) Their point was that even healthy young men could be felled by this disease which, with their vaccine, had become preventable.

Medications

During the battle against infectious diseases, a plethora of medications were advertised purporting to be curative or beneficial against them. Some peddlers kept their ingredients secret. So on every page in the advertising section, there was a statement from the AMA Principles of Ethics: "It is equally derogatory to professional character for physicians to dispense or promote the use of secret remedies."

There frequently were many ads for **Cholegestin** that was said to work against "biliary stasis, neurotic symptoms, intestinal flatulence, and hepato-intestinal toxemia." It worked "by its combined cholagogue antiseptic and digestive action, increases and liquefies the natural laxative." Some of their ads were folksy, asking if your liver is "like a lazy horse?" Other ads recommended the **Fellows Syrup of Hypophosphites** to obtain "immediate results in: anemia, neurasthenia, bronchitis and pulmonary tuberculosis." It was prepared by Mr. Fellows of New York City, and "each dram had the equivalent of 1/64 grain of pure strychnine." In 1913, there was an ad for **Digalen** by the Hoffmann-LaRoche Chemical Works. It was a standard digitalis preparation useful to control the "myocarditis of Tuberculosis."⁴

Meat packing and beer companies

Meat packing and beer companies also promoted their by-products for medicinal uses. The **Armour Co** of Chicago promoted **Lecithol** as an "emulsion of lecithin, the most important organic phosphorin compound in the brain and nerve tissue." It is useful to "simulate nutrition, increase hemoglobin and leukocytes...indicated in rickets, infantile atrophy, pancreatic diabetes, chlorosis, tuberculosis and as a tonic for the aged and overworked." Armour also promoted Extracts of Pure Bone Marrow for anemia.

Also Pituitary Liquid, the active principle of the posterior lobe of the pituitary body to be "useful in surgical shock, intestinal paresis, uremic poisoning and protracted labor." In the push to control the impurities and errant dosages, it was helpful in 1908 when Pharmacology emerged in the US as a profession.⁵

The Anheuser-Busch Co of St. Louis promoted a Malt-Nutrine which they claimed was recognized as a tonic for nursing mothers and protracted convalescence. "She who nurses one must nurture two." It was low in alcohol (2 percent) but high in food value with 14 percent extracts of hops and malts.

Horse Stables

In 1904, horses were the usual means of transportation. The California Stables on California Street in San Francisco ran a small ad for rental of rubber-tired carriages by the hour, with special rates for doctors. When medical practices were sold, it was not infrequent that a horse and carriage went with the practice. A reasonable income for a doctor these years was \$5,000 to \$8,000 a year This was largely net, as there was no income tax (until the 16th Amendment in 1913). There were no ads from the Ford Motor Co, but in 1914, the last year of this survey, there were full-page ads for Chalmers Motor cars. Two 1914 Chalmers models went for \$1,925 and \$2,325 respectively.

Telephones, typewriters, fans

Other companies advertised their inventions, such as Bell Telephone which pointed out how much more effective a doctor could be if his orders were heard instantaneously. Underwood advertised its typewriters, and National Electric Co. promoted electric fans designed to make patients more comfortable.

There were also ads for bill collectors and malpractice insurance companies. There was a small ad for an intern to work in a 25-bed hospital for \$25. a week. It caught our eye because it would have been illegal today. It discriminated its hiring of "a male interne, a Protestant and non-drinker."

These are but a few of the snapshots that you would discover from mining these volumes for history. From these 10 years, we see that medicine 100 years ago was just emerging from homeopathy and home remedies into a new era of scientific discovery, with preventive medicine leading the way. Old ways were stubbornly difficult to break, and the importance of the AMA and the young CMA in the struggle for effective remedies and against profiteering is evident.

The institutions that housed patients, both sanatoriums and hospitals, were big industries then, and they were largely controlled by physician-owners. However, university medical schools and their hospitals were beginning to compete with these in the larger cities. Malpractice was alive and, although malpractice insurance was available, there was no such thing as health insurance.

These ads might be said to expose medicine at its worst - providing a forum for commercialization and opportunities for the avaricious. The pharmaceutical industry that today seems to have such oversized power that it has contaminated the faculties of our medical schools, was barely at an embryonic stage 100 years ago. However, we must remember how few doctors, then or now, ever engaged in advertising.

In the past, most doctors, and even more so the nurses, risked not only their own lives but those of their families, in daily contact with patients with mysterious lethal diseases, many without any cure.⁶ One benefit of the ads was to help pay for a journal that provided the busy practitioner with the latest answers for some of the devilish problems he had to take on.

1. In 1904, the life expectancy in the US for men was 46 and women 49 years. Ten years later, it was 52 years for men and 57 for women.
2. In 1910, the death rate from tuberculosis in the US was 154 per 100,000. It was 156 per 100,000 for influenza/pneumonia and 21 per 100,000 for diphtheria.
3. In the 1890's Emil von Behring developed a diphtheria antitoxin for which he was awarded the first Nobel Prize in Medicine. A diphtheria vaccine was not developed until 1913. In 1909, Frederick Russell, a US Army physician, developed an American vaccine against typhoid fever, and in 1911, the entire US Army was inoculated which wiped out that disease in the military.
4. Digitalis from foxglove had been known to be of benefit for patients with heart failure and dropsy since 1776, but extracts and dosages were particularly difficult to standardize, and an overdose could be fatal. It is not clear just how earlier physicians found access to it, but this is the first ad in the journal of a commercial preparation.
5. On December 28, 1908, under the leadership of Dr. John J Abel, eighteen men met in the pharmacology lecture room of the Johns Hopkins University Medical School to establish the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET).
6. Refer to "The Death of a Young Pathologist in 1890", SSV Medicine, May-June, 2008.