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THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF FIFTY YEARS

BENSON FORD*

Usually a person at the focus of so much attention from doctors as I am at this moment is in no position to talk. Happily for me, I have your attention not because of your medical curiosity or scientific dedication, but because I have had the good fortune to work with you and to share with you some of the travail and triumphs of Henry Ford Hospital, as a member of its Board of Trustees.

Some of you, who have been around Henry Ford Hospital a long time, may recall that Henry Ford had little confidence in committees or boards. He once poked fun at them with the observation: "A board is a piece of slab wood — with splinters in it." The discrepancy between the founder's view and the present role of our Board is only one of a number of contradictions in the history of this hospital.

Fifty years ago Henry Ford was content to found a good general community hospital to serve his neighbors in Detroit. Today that hospital stands as a monumental medical facility of immense scope and worldwide fame. The man for whom our hospital was named thought the institution should be self-supporting. Yet, for almost the first half of its existence it operated in the red.

Envisioned as a hospital for the middle class and as an institution whose service to the community depended importantly on its ability to remain self-sustaining, it was intended that Henry Ford Hospital not be encumbered by the usual burden of charity cases. Still, there were an untold number of "guest" patients throughout its formative years, and during the depression a half-million dollars' worth of free work and care was dispensed annually.

Born out of discord in the community and buffeted by the hostility of many in the medical profession, the Hospital is distinguished today as the preeminent medical center of the metropolis, a source of civic pride and a focus of community respect.

*Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Henry Ford Hospital.
On tight budgets in early times, Ford Hospital gave its employees neither time nor funds to attend medical conventions or meetings of learned societies. Research performed was minimal. Quite a contrast with this is the fact that Ford Hospital now regularly serves as host to international symposia of the world's leading medical experts and now has, at any one time, some 150 research projects under way within its own facilities.

To understand these apparent contradictions, it is necessary to understand the times and the man at the moment in history when Henry Ford founded the Hospital. We must know something of what the sick faced and what Henry Ford proposed. As America moved into the twentieth century and began to desert the horses and habits of the Victorian era for the machines and methods of more modern times, medicine also entered a new age.

Technical advances and anesthetics had made surgery more effective and less fearful. The infectious diseases were man's principal threat to health. Many physicians were trained in numerous small proprietary schools. Hospitals operated on the assumption that the well-to-do could afford the best. Their service to the poor of the community could be measured by the length of time the less fortunate clutched their 10-cent tickets while seated on the hard benches of clinic waiting rooms.

Henry Ford was determined that the working man and his family should receive good medical care at moderate prices and at no needless sacrifice to dignity. He wanted them to be treated as patients and not as supplicants.

In 1909 he was finance chairman of a group attempting to build a large new private hospital independent of the influence of the much-criticized commercial medical schools. When work on the fledgling hospital ceased in 1914 and the aims of the group began to splinter, he decided to take on the job himself.

He proposed, and the trustees of the "Detroit General Hospital" agreed, that the land and partially completed buildings should be turned over to him. In turn, he was to return all prior contributions and receive a free hand in completing and operating the new institution.

About 50 years ago tonight the staff of this hospital consisted of one doctor. The patient load consisted of three persons, whom that physician had brought with him when he closed his downtown practice to join the new hospital in which he so firmly believed. But if the resources were few, the hopes and the aims were high. The new hospital set out to accomplish the following:

1. To provide an expert staff of full-time salaried physicians, without private practice, who would have sole care of patients in the hospital.

2. To operate on a self-sustaining basis at "a price so low as to be within reach of everyone," but a price that everyone must pay.
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3. To set flat rates for treatment and hospitalization. (Implementation of this goal at one time had the doctors notifying accounting personnel of the services they had rendered by means of symbols which the business office people then converted into dollar amounts.)

4. To institute a system of cooperative diagnosis so that underlying causes and not symptoms were being treated. The patients were to be examined by a senior physician and then by any number of additional specialists, after which findings were collected and coordinated to make a scientific diagnosis.

5. To create an ambulatory outpatient service that would permit efficient use of hospital resources and personnel while handling the patient as something more than a numbered case. People were to come to the clinic to see a specific doctor at a specified time. If this advantage of private practice could be transferred successfully to a large urban hospital, the patient's dignity would be protected and hospital efficiency need not suffer.

Henry Ford is sometimes charged with having taken only perfunctory interest in the Hospital. However, men who remember those days recall that he was a frequent visitor, roaming about the premises and talking to patients, particularly the children.

He expected hospital personnel to work hard, just as he expected all Ford Motor Company people to work hard. The Hospital staff had immense esprit de corps, and gave the Hospital and each other their best. Ford money went into the Hospital, true; but the brains and the skill and the dedication of doctors, nurses, scientists and teachers built it.

Did Henry Ford Hospital accomplish those five early intentions? Here are five answers, one for each aim.

1. The Hospital's staff consists today of some 500 physicians, surgeons and scientists. About half are the dedicated, full-time staff members that Henry Ford envisioned, and the others are similarly dedicated interns and residents in training. Your hospital is one of the rare institutions approved for practice and training in virtually every specialty field of medicine and surgery. The number of diplomates and fellows among you and the number of memberships you hold in specialty and scientific organizations is staggering.

2. As to the Hospital's self-sufficiency, since the late 1930's Henry Ford Hospital has generated all the money needed for its own support. Not only has it met successfully the heavy day-to-day expenses common to every hospital, but it has also supported large and expensive educational and research programs. It has provided for maintenance and improvement of the buildings, and it has installed advanced new equipment so that the highest standards of patient care and treatment are always available.
3. Steadily rising living costs and standards of patient care and treatment have dealt a mortal blow to the low, flat rates the founder envisioned. The tens of thousands who come to Ford Hospital these days are not attracted by "bargain" medicine, but by quality of service. Even so, in terms of that quality, they pay modestly.

4. Perceptive and accurate diagnosis, the *sine qua non* of medicine, is a hallmark of Ford Hospital. It is the result of rapport and teamwork by experts who know and respect each other, and who function together with no other aim but to practice the best possible medicine.

5. What of the hope for an outpatient diagnostic and treatment center, one that would offer an ideal combination of the private doctor's office and the large clinic? The best measure of achievement in this area is probably the avidity with which patients seek the service. The chart on growth of patient calls looks like the left half of an Alpine peak; the breakdown of daily treatment reads like a catalog of the medical specialties. Each day about 3,000 visits between doctor and patient take place in the clinic building.

There are, of course, many ways of measuring success. Those five items I have just reviewed are one measure, a comparison of what your hospital's founding fathers wanted and what you have achieved. It's an impressive record, but I want to add a few more items to our institution's list of achievements. They are not the most important, perhaps, nor even the most representative. I use them simply because they come easily to a layman's mind.

The modern practice of putting surgical patients on their feet soon after operations to prevent blood clot and other complications was instituted at an early date. The Hospital was one of the first to perform open heart surgery, and to develop drug treatment for cancer patients. Here, new techniques of great vessel surgery and of ear surgery for deafness were devised.

In this institution, statistics showed that anticoagulants after coronary thrombosis reduce the likelihood of recurrence. (At this moment a couple of hundred Ford Hospital patients, past and present, are using anticoagulants for this purpose. Some are in this room.)

Finally, Henry Ford Hospital attracts worldwide medical attention through its international symposia not merely because it is receptive to progress, but in recognition that it often is the agent of progress.

If you are impressed, even humbled, by these achievements (as I am) then perhaps we might well consider for a few moments not only what the founders and builders of the Hospital have accomplished over the past 50 years but also what *we want today* for Ford Hospital.
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In a few moments Dr. Robin Buerki will talk about the next 50 years, in contrast to my remarks about the past 50. I do not mean to intrude on his area, but neither do I want to leave the present in a kind of oratorical limbo between us.

This is the age of specialization throughout society. More and more, men have come to concentrate their brains and abilities on one area, and to become increasingly the masters of it. As each specialty becomes more involved and more demanding of its practitioners, the danger of compartmentalizing knowledge and skill grows. Some force must be generated to balance this trend, some mechanism must channel its power for good. That, I think, is what this Hospital has succeeded in doing. As one of you remarked in conversation recently, “The black bag is vanishing; the new symbol of medical skill is the hospital.” That sums up the situation beautifully.

In this, the era of science and technology in medicine, physicians will be increasingly deployed around equipment. That means a hospital.

Because the various physicians must of necessity know more and more about constantly expanding fields of knowledge they must be specialists, as so many of you in this room are. Because no specialty field can stand alone, the doctors must collaborate in complete trust and confidence. That, it strikes me, is a good description of your Hospital today.

Ford Hospital is what you and your earlier associates there made it — a collection of well-maintained and well-groomed buildings, rich in equipment, but richer in spirit. It is a place of healing, obviously. But, and this is not so obvious to our community, it is also a place of distinguished teachers and brilliant students. The doctor-teachers of Henry Ford Hospital and the scientists of Edsel B. Ford Institute for Medical Research have given thousands upon thousands of highly qualified doctors, nurses, technicians and dietitians an unsurpassed background in their fields.

Knowledge not only is used and imparted at Henry Ford Hospital, it is created there. Each case and each cure — indeed the failures, too — contribute to the sum of medical knowledge and the continual melting away of medicine’s mysteries. Healing and teaching — two of mankind’s greatest professions — are wrapped up in this Hospital, and in each of you who have served it. I am deeply proud and honored to have had the privilege of helping you and working with you.

I can best express those feelings by focusing them in tribute to one man among you who quite appropriately represents all of you. Over the past half-century at Henry Ford Hospital he has shared your work and hopes, your failures and your triumphs. He was the first of you. He is, I think we’d all agree, the living symbol of this Hospital — Dr. Frank J. Sladen.