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FRANK J. SLADEN, M. D.
1882 - 1973

FRANK J. SLADEN, M. D., first and founding physician of Henry Ford Hospital, died Saturday, November 10, 1973, following a lingering illness. He was 91 years old. Services were held at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, November 23. The body was cremated.

Born in West Point, New York, and a graduate of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in 1906, Dr. Sladen was in private practice in Detroit when he was chosen by the late Henry Ford in 1915 to organize a medical staff for a new general hospital in what was then a remote area of the city at West Grand Boulevard and Hamilton Avenue. Mr. Ford had taken over development of the hospital after a group of citizens, organized five years earlier as the Detroit General Hospital Association, found itself unable to proceed with the project.

At Mr. Ford’s direction and with a nucleus of outstanding graduates from Johns Hopkins, Dr. Sladen and the late Dr. Roy D. McClure established one of the country’s first group practice health care centers. They pioneered the concept of a “closed staff” of physicians and surgeons whose offices and total practice were at the hospital. Dr. Sladen helped to make Henry Ford one of the country’s leading teaching hospitals to which medical graduates eagerly sought appointments.

Thousands of alumni, now practicing in most parts of the world, have been influenced by his unique qualities as a physician and preceptor over more than half a century. Associates admired him for his warm and personal approach to treating illness in the human being as a whole, recognizing the interplay between emotional, spiritual and physical factors.

On the first page of the first issue of the former HENRY FORD HOSPITAL MEDICAL BULLETIN (now the Journal), the editors said:

The career of Dr. Frank J. Sladen might be expressed as concerned with four periods of activity. The first, that of training and preparation, amounted to eleven years at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and abroad as a member of the Hospital staff and of the Medical School Faculty. The second had to do with the beginnings and development of the Henry Ford Hospital; the third, the War Service; and fourthly, the administrative and executive functions in the conduct of the Department of Medicine and of the now mature phase of our Hospital.

It is possible to refer here only briefly to a number of his contributions. Noteworthy is the work on the then little known process of the coagulation of the blood with Frank Hinman, in medical student days.1 The responsibility for the study and application of antiteningitis serum (Flexner) a product of Dr. Simon Flexner, Director of The Rockefeller Institute, resulted in a number of reports.2 The 66% mortality of meningococcus infections prevalent at the time was reversed to a 75% recovery. During this period, he reported with Dr. Harvey Cushing the first instance of the application of therapeutic serum by the cerebral intraventricular route.3 Studies of the autonomic nervous system and of the pharmacodynamic reactions, just introduced by Slesinger of Vienna, followed with Dr. Lewellys F. Barker.4
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For twenty years the basic factors of individual personal health have occupied his interest leading to such developments as studies of the longitudinal curve of life and of the constitutional background of chronic disease, particularly as applied to rheumatoid arthritis and degenerative states.

In 1940 he delivered the address of dedication of The Physician's Window at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C. A major interest in bridging the gap between religion and medicine has been carried out for several years under the National Council of Churches. His organization and conduct of the National Conference on Psychiatry and the War in 1942 must be noted. Dr. Sladen was the editor of a volume under that title published by Charles C. Thomas. Several publications have appeared over his name giving intimate pictures of Sir William Osler and his bedside and clinic teaching. Dr. Sladen's interests at the present time are concerned with the largely unexplored field of the problems of the aging population and with the basic factors in the so-called physiological aging process of man.

When Dr. Sladen retired to consultant status in 1953, he continued to maintain an office at the Hospital and to see patients well past his 89th birthday.

He was a fellow of the American College of Physicians and a member of the American Medical Association, the American Rheumatism Association and the Central Society for Clinical Research. During World War I, when Henry Ford Hospital was turned over to the U.S. Government as a field hospital for returning wounded soldiers, Dr. Sladen was a major in the Army Medical Corps.

He is survived by his wife, Catherine; a son, Frank J. Jr.; two daughters, Mrs. Rowland L. (Catherine) Hall, of Winnetka, Ill., and Mrs. John H. (Inin) Wardell, of Midland, Mich.; a foster son, James P. Crawford; eight grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

—Enisse Chimes

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