Background and Purpose of the Edsel B. Ford Institute for Medical Research

Frank J. Sladen

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.henryford.com/hfhmedjournal

Part of the Life Sciences Commons, Medical Specialties Commons, and the Public Health Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://scholarlycommons.henryford.com/hfhmedjournal/vol6/iss1/15

This Part II is brought to you for free and open access by Henry Ford Health System Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Henry Ford Hospital Medical Journal by an authorized editor of Henry Ford Health System Scholarly Commons.
BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE

EDSEL B. FORD INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH

DR. FRANK J. SLADEN

Ten years have elapsed since the Trustees of the Henry Ford Hospital established the beginnings of a basic laboratory group and gave it the name of a man, beloved by everyone who knew him, a man who in his understanding and wisdom and exceptional friendliness, had so much to do with the growth and development of the Henry Ford Hospital itself.

This name seemed extremely appropriate and right, in view of the fact that no one knew the Hospital and the staff better than he did or was more encouraging and inspiring to those who were eager to put the work of the institution on the highest levels of research, education, and medical care.

This name itself gave assurance to the forward-looking staff of those days, that the Institute would grow in its way as differing from the activities of the clinical departments of the Hospital proper, and in due time become indispensable as a basic source of new truths and inspiration to the parent institution. The belief is still as sound as it was ten years ago, that out of pure research in Chemistry, Physics, Bacteriology, Pharmacology, Physiology, and Biology will come the stimulating opportunities for advance in medical knowledge.

The eventful growth in the work of the Henry Ford Hospital has naturally been accompanied by changes in personnel and procedure, conditions which would be expected to result in some loss of appreciation and realization of the background facts upon which certain decisions were made earlier in relation to procedures and activities that still continue.

In some ways the Edsel B. Ford Institute for Medical Research has had this experience and has to some extent struggled against the results of it. This will be more clearly understood as the details of the beginnings are recorded later in this Foreword.

One idealizes pure research today as conditioned by opportunities for devotion to pursuit of truth, in right environment, with adequate equipment and supplies, under capable and inspiring leadership, attracting and training younger research workers by published results as well as by the facilities provided.

The individual reports of the Department of Biochemistry under Dr. Gaebler and of the Department of Physics under Dr. Watson attest how excellently they have built their staffs and employed their opportunities in these ten years of the existence of the Institute.

This has been accomplished in the revamped top floor and portion of the second floor of the Maintenance Building of the hospital, not the most ideal location. Pasteur indeed had much less. The limitations or circumstances of dependence upon the Hospital for space and maintenance enable knowing ones to understand the situation.

This is particularly understandable because, in the same year of the establishment of the Institute, the Henry Ford Hospital began the planning and ultimate financing and erection of the seventeen story Clinic Building. The organization of the Institute, the attracting and interesting of the best personnel, the maintaining of the spirit of fruitful endeavor and of the morale of the staff members have been accomplished in spite of these difficulties.

The Hospital was opened in September, 1915, and a recess occurred from 1918 to 1922 when the staff participated in World War I and the buildings became U. S. Army General Hospital Number 12. From 1922 to 1952, the growth of the Hospital was extraordinary considering the many unusual and unorthodox features of its operation. We refer to the full-time employment of the staff, the substitution of a quality of private patient-private doctor outpatient system for the more orthodox dispensary plan, the previously unheard of deposit in advance of inpatient admissions, the appointment card for outpatient visits, and many other at that time unorthodox procedures. However, many of these have been adopted elsewhere and are now in more or less general use.

The contributions of Mr. Henry Ford and Mr. Edsel Ford to the story of hospital procedures has not yet had the recognition it deserves. This is a subject upon which the writer is already busying himself.

To properly picture what was behind the establishment of the Edsel B. Ford Institute for Medical Research, one must go back to the turn of the century, or even earlier.

When Dr. William Osler left Baltimore and the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1905 and became the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, he expressed as his greatest pride the fact that he was responsible for the introduction of bedside teaching of medical students. This began with the first class in the Medical School of Johns Hopkins University graduating in 1897.

With this beginning the University Hospitals of the country became the centers of medical education and research. A great contrast existed in the so-called non-university hospitals. The medical school faculties were responsible for this. They supplied the doctors who took the responsibility of the medical work in the University Hospitals. Not a small factor, by any means, was the proximity of the laboratories and the teaching of the basic sciences in the medical schools. Solid foundation was given to the clinical staff work of these hospitals by the research work of those in the basic science fields.

From 1915 to 1935, the staff of the Henry Ford Hospital grew not only in numbers but also in the spirit of teaching. This was related to the realization that many of its staff members had previously been members of such faculties, and had experienced the stimulations and satisfactions of teaching. They wanted to teach. This led in time to the development of a curriculum in the Henry Ford Hospital for men in training, for the intern in his first year, for the second and third year men, Assistant Residents and Residents, and for the fourth and fifth year men in advanced work in one field or another.
Thus a faculty arose composed of the “permanent” staff men in charge of divisions and departments and their associates as contrasted to those mentioned above who were in training. This amounted to a faculty of seventy-five men carrying out a curriculum for one hundred and twenty-five of the “temporary” staff men. It was no small task considering the fact that this was a non-university hospital designed to meet community needs. Every staff member was under demand to care for inpatients and outpatients, who expected personal consideration and service.

The so-called academic freedom was an unknown item in such a situation.

For a time, an arrangement existed whereby men could earn a degree of Master of Science in Surgery, for instance, from the University of Michigan, by attending certain seminars and teaching activities in Ann Arbor and giving evidence of work accomplished in the Henry Ford Hospital, in addition to writing an acceptable thesis at the end of the year.

The Hospital thus played the part of the field laboratory where the work was done in a creditable way by the candidate under the supervision of the particular hospital department head. The second World War interrupted the progress of this plan. But before that occurred the Medical Board of the Hospital sent Dr. Arthur McGraw to consult with the State Superintendent of Instruction in Lansing. His mission was to find out what requirements had to be met before an educational institution could be given the authority to grant a degree. This was an exploration of the idea only, although the Board was convinced of the teaching abilities of the staff and of the quality of the teaching being done as well as the abundance of the material available for teaching.

It was interesting to learn that two important features were lacking in the Henry Ford Hospital. The first was adequate classrooms and physical facilities for teaching; the second, basic science laboratories manned by a qualified teaching force.

The knowledge that these two factors were lacking led to changes in the Henry Ford Hospital which are today of the greatest significance, and more and more they tend to bring very potent influences to bear upon the future.

Included in the plans of the seventeen story Clinic Building of the Hospital were the results of study of the needed teaching facilities.

The provision of an auditorium of unusual conveniences and usefulness for assemblies of size is now a feature of the Clinic Building. Throughout the seventeen stories of this building, devoted to diagnostic and therapeutic work with ambulatory patients, are larger and smaller class rooms, staff conference rooms, even specialized laboratories in addition to the clinical laboratories of the hospital. A busy daily schedule of teaching is published weekly, focused upon the men in training, from the first year interns up to and including men in advanced specialized fields. The activities of the Nurses Training School are added to those of the School of Dietetic Interns, the Schools of Medical Technologists and of X-ray Technicians, and of Physical Therapy and of Occupational Therapy, to give the environment of medical care a real atmosphere of academic medicine and teaching, in this non-university hospital.
Today, in the foreground of the Hospital activities is the challenge of graduate education. This is now an established function of the Staff, and desirable in the minds of its members, although time-consuming in their schedules. This is not to be confused with postgraduate work, interpreted as refresher courses, and similar make-up or getting-up-to-date efforts. No belittling of the value of such work for men who want it, or need it, or are inclined to provide it, is intended.

The carrying of training further into advanced phases of medicine, surgery, and the specialties represents the aim of the present active curriculum. It might be said that this principle actually begins with internships and is carried through the residencies, even though the problems of practical application, of handling of patients and of training of reflexes may seem to predominate at times.

This policy of graduate education established as it is today is invaluably undergirded by the basic sciences grouped in a building which is a laboratory, research and teaching center, located on the Hospital grounds; and intimately related to the teaching and research activities of the Hospital staff. Indeed it is an indispensable feature in a great educational institution which has already trained nearly two thousand men now located in different professional capacities throughout this and other countries.

To this Hospital, then, is added the provision of the Basic Sciences, designed as pure sciences, operating within their own fields in research, and yet so near to the members of the clinical staff and their work as to feel the prevailing interests and the answers being sought in the minds of the Hospital Staff proper. There is no question of the advantages to the clinical staff in having so near-at-hand laboratories of Biochemistry and of Physics, functioning in addition to their own particular interests, to aid and abet the researches of the clinical men, and to collaborate with them when problems are of mutual interest.

The greater goal will be attained when other basic fields are represented by departments also, and the whole Institute properly housed in its own building, operating under one head, a committee of the staff, or one individual, who will coordinate the work to its greatest productiveness and provide even better the relationship desired by the Clinical Staff. Then, hopefully, it will be able to operate under its own budget as well. These accomplishments will earn for the Edsel B. Ford Institute for Medical Research its place in the sunlight and the full recognition of the significant purpose of its origin.

Whether the present curriculum of graduate teaching becomes more formal and attains the right to award graduate degrees in specialized fields, the added requirements are now fulfilled. Medical education in the graduate field is firmly established, the required facilities are available, and the provision of groundwork science is now a reality.