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On Becoming a Resident Surgeon

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NOTES AND COMMENTS II

On Becoming a Resident Surgeon *

D. Emerick Szilagyi, M.D.**

The 1st of July is a remarkable day in the life of the physicians of an institution like this—in many important ways, the most remarkable day of the year. Indeed, for those who are starting their internship or who begin their residency in a new location it is one of the most significant days of their lives, for they are taking their first step on the road to their ultimate professional destiny. In this sense, the day is a rather solemn one.

There is another thing about this day that, though lacking in solemnity, is no less remarkable, and that is the sudden telescoping of time. In the fleeting moment between midnight, June 30th, and the dawn of July 1st, a generation of physicians gains a whole year's growth in stature and wisdom. The medical student becomes a full-fledged healer of the sick, the junior resident taking orders assumes the awesome authority of giving orders. The seeker for consultation suddenly finds himself being asked for consultation. In fact, it is possible for a man on July 1st to answer the consultation request

he wrote on June 30th—this has happened, and more than once,—perhaps the most striking example of speed in the growth of intellect one can find even in this age of supersonic speed.

There is a sense of lively expectation but also a vague feeling of apprehension in the air on the 1st of July. The senior staff is like the general facing a campaign with an army of recruits, well-selected and carefully drilled but untried in battle. The recruits themselves are eager but unsure. The terrain is uncharted, the weapons new, and the officers are strangers. It is comforting to remember that this bloodless—well, mostly bloodless—campaign always ends successfully. In a much shorter space of time than you imagine the ground becomes familiar, the weapons prove to be in good order, the officers generally turn out to be good guys, and by next June 30th the issues are resolved with very little loss of life. Then, of course, another generation enters the field with an air of pleasant anticipation mixed with a vague feeling of apprehension.

On behalf of the officers in the surgical cadre, I wish you the very best luck in the coming campaign.

*Presented at indoctrination of resident surgical staff, Henry Ford Hospital

**Chairman, Department of Surgery