

The Song of Diabetes

This ingenious poem, in the manner of Longfellow's "Hiawatha," was read by its author, Dr. Cecil Striker, at the Banquet of the 12th Annual Meeting of the ADA in Chicago, June 7, 1952.



CECIL STRIKER, M.D.

In the office of the doctor,
In the sanctum of the specialist,
Sat the diabetic patient.
Seven cardinal symptoms had he,
Seven means of recognition.
High blood sugar, malnutrition,
Nagging weakness, all these had he,
Polydypsia, polyuria,
Polyphagia, glycosuria,
And the doctor started speaking,
"I am here to guide and warn you,
Here to treat you and instruct you.
Two great friends have diabetes,
Singled out from all the others.
Basic therapy is diet,
Insulin when indicated.
Some there are, who need no
insulin;
Diet only may control them.
Magic savior is insulin
For those others who require it.

Follow faithfully your orders,
Comrade make, of diabetes,
Working with it, not against it,
Thus avoiding psychic conflict.
Life expectancy is lengthened,
Yea, assured is normal living!
T'was not always so, my patient,
In the days before Minkowski,
In the days of poor prognosis,
In the days before von Noorden.
Long before the days of these men,

Claude Bernard, experimenter,
Studied enzymes of digestion,
Medullary sugar center,
Store of glycogen by liver,
Fathered modern physiology,
Paved the way for later research,
For all those who followed after.

Many men there were who labored
On the puzzle of the pancreas.
There was Max von Pettenkofer
Classical investigator,
Carl von Voit on dietetics,
Rubner of the calorimeter,
Heat and energy he measured,
Lusk and Benedict his followers;
Langerhans for islands noted.
Kussmaul recognized air-hunger,
Labeled now as Kussmaul breathing.
Naunyn, coiner of a new word,
Coined the new word, acidosis;
Magnus-Levy treated coma;
Emil Fischer, noted chemist,
Henry Sherman for nutrition.
These were men who laid the
background,
Pioneers, these research giants;
Built the bridge between the patient
And the laboratory findings."

When the patient left his office,
Long the doctor sat and pondered
On the cause of glycosuria,
On the function of the liver.

Fate of glycogen he pondered,
On cholesterol reflected.
D:N ratio he thought of,
Ketone bodies, oxysteroids.
Factors chemical he mused on,
On this segment of the problem.
Thought then, of another segment,
Of the role of the adrenal,
Of hypophysis secretion.
Pancreas beta cells considered
And the alpha cell production;
Of the mystery of the granules.
Thyroid, ovaries and testes,
How essential their secretions.
All the endocrines considered
And the need for homeostasis.

As he mused thus, meditative,
Science spoke then, to the doctor;
Spoke to him of diabetes
And of all its complications,
Sending terror to its victims,
Sending grief and death among them.
Spoke to him of acidosis,
Painted him a vivid picture
Of the patient acidotic,
Of the patient sorely suffering;
Hard his breath came through his
nostrils,
Through his teeth he buzzed and
muttered.
Retinopathy depicted,
Dreaded macular involvement,

With its tragic blinded victims
Hearing voices call in darkness.
And arteriosclerosis
With its manifold involvements,
Such as striking early onset,
Of diseases coronary.

Then of legs and feet spoke science,
Spoke of crippling claudication,
Of restricted ambulation,
Painful, cramping, locomotion;
Of the failure to recover
From a superficial trauma;
Deeper, deeper, damage spreading,
Patient plagued by fear of gangrene;
With the sloughing wound enlarging,
Pain and apprehension mingled,
Who, by doubt and anguish tortured,
Then presented serious problems.
Spoke of worsened diabetes,
Spoke of worsened minor lesions,
Then of diabetic gangrene,
Gangrene with its poor prognosis.
Spoke of need for amputation
And the points of amputation;
Mentioned Lisfranc, subpatellar,
And the higher mid-thigh region.

Warned of kidney complications,
Of severe albuminuria,
Casts, edema, and uremia,
Kimmelstiel, their designation.
Warned of insulin reaction
With pre-prandial cephalgia;
With diplopia and confusion,
Cold and clammy perspiration,
Dizziness with wheeling, whirling,
Whirling, round and round,
and downward.
Loss of consciousness may follow
Sometimes death, alas, ensuing.
Miscellaneous others mentioned,
Carbuncle, pruritus vulvae,
Painful osteoporosis,
And peripheral neuritis.

Sad, the doctor as he listened,
Sad, because of dismal warnings,
Still, he smiled when he remembered
All the tools at his disposal.
Thought of insulin, rejoicing,

Of the men who gave it to us;
Paused to cheer for Best and Banting,
Names to celebrate forever!
From the snares of previous failures,
From the case report of Barron,
Came the concept of extraction.
All alone worked Best and Banting,
Labored long and tedious hours.
From tenacity came triumph,
Came the joy of isolation,
Came the proof, the confirmation.
Thought then of the work of Joslin
With his passion for perfection,
Indefatigable worker
With unquenchable endurance;
With meticulous instruction
For strict control of patients, and
Statistical analysis
Of clinical material.
Thought of other great clinicians,
Thought of scientific methods,
Thought of work in laboratories,
Thought of all the dietitians.

And the doctor's grateful spirit
Set him in a mood for singing:
"Sing, oh song of diabetes
Of the happy days to follow,
In the land of glycosuria,
In the pleasant land and peaceful.
Sing the mysteries of the pancreas,
Sing the blessings of the insulins;
Buried is dread malnutrition,
Buried is starvation diet,
Buried hypoproteinemia,
Massive hepar is forgotten."
Hailed the use of all the insulins
And gave thanks for their inventors,
Thankful for their skill and wisdom,
Thankful too, for new improvements.
Protamine and NPH with
Prolonged action in the body,
These discovered by the scholar
Hagedorn, the sage of Denmark.
Cheered the gratifying prospect
For the diabetic children,
For their rehabilitation,
Normal growth, and good nutrition;
Cheered the child who takes his hypo,
And his fine cooperation;
Doomed, before, to rapid wasting,

Cheered because that child is living.
And he hailed a great achievement:
Pregnancy of diabetics,
Long a sad and sorry story,
Now, a joyous, safe experience,
As the faithful diabetic
Bears a child unto her husband,
With the beauty of its mother,
And the vigor of its father.

Then the doctor, looking forward,
Looking, then, toward future progress,
Dreamed of greater knowledge, insight,
Into diabetic problems.
Dreamed a dream of insulin, of
Molecule complex and heavy,
Of its structural arrangement,
Of its chemical components.
Abel isolated sulphur;
Might more fractions be discovered,
Fractions which might be effective
In the treatment of the patient?
Might not synthesis be realized,
Oral insulin perfected,
Newer chemicals discovered
Finding cause for diabetes?
Dreamed of chemistry of glucose
And of energy production;
Of the metabolic process,
Tissue chemistry, and enzymes.
Dreamed of new and complex factors,
Of the role of hexose phosphate
In obscure phosphorylation;
Mystery of deamination;
Of sulphhydryl radical with
Its importance undetermined,
Future place of isotopes, of
Glutathione and alloxan.

All these ideas, all these problems
Thoughtful doctors have in common;
All the members of this conclave,
Making A.D.A. their symbol.
Bound together, dedicated,
Organized to help the patient,
Organized to teach the doctor,
A.D.A. their torch resplendent!

—CECIL STRIKER, M.D.
Cincinnati, O.