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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DEAR EDITOR:

A book, *Familiar Medical Quotations*, which we hope will be a great collection of wit and wisdom from and about physicians of the ages is being assembled. The writings and utterances of physicians, teachers and investigators from the dawn of medical history to the present are being sifted for the nuggets of genius and brilliant good humor which characterize the humanity of a profession. The collection will also include quotes from lay writers—including the Scriptures—dealing with disease, doctors and medical life.

We are particularly anxious to obtain the quotations of individuals who, unlike Shakespeare and Osler, have hidden their occasional gems so that only a few are aware of them.

We welcome all such favorite quotes that your readers would like to see included in this volume. Contributions may be addressed to me c/o *Familiar Medical Quotations*, 34 Beacon St., Boston, Mass. 02106.

Sincerely yours,

MAURICE B. STRAUSS, M.D.
Editor

BOOK REVIEWS

ACETON BIS ZUCKER (Aceton to Sugar), NACHSCHLAGEBUCH FÜR ZUCKERKRANKE (A Reference Book for Diabetics). By G. Katsch, G. Mohnike and H. J. John. 4th edition, 232 pages with 33 illustrations, VEB Georg Thieme, Leipzig, 1964.

This is an excellent compendium written for the layman, but undoubtedly also of value to the practicing physician, the nurse, the dietitian and the social worker, who have to instruct diabetic patients about the nature of the disease, its complications and its management. In alphabetical order, from A to Z, the various topics are presented authoritatively. The discussions are brief, but concise, where general background information is concerned. They are limited to definitions or translations in the case of medical terms, but are detailed wherever they deal with the management of the disease. Thus, adequate space is given to diet planning and food values, to the measuring of insulin and technic of insulin injections, to urinalysis, to care of the feet, general hygiene, etc. A number of excellent illustrations and tables enhance the value of the book. The diabetic patient who is interested in getting acquainted intelligently and intimately with his disease will find a wealth of information and answers to all the questions which arise in living with diabetes.

DIABETES AS A WAY OF LIFE. By T. S. Danowski, M.D. \$4.50, 186 pp., Coward-McCann, New York, 1964.

This is the second edition of a manual for diabetic persons, first published in 1957. The book's outstanding qualities are

its dispassionate, objective way of looking at the problems of diabetes and the articulate, adult manner in which the information is presented. The emphasis throughout is on a balanced presentation of alternative and sometimes conflicting points of view, with the evident aim of informing the patient thoroughly so that he can understand the approach behind his physician's sometimes apparently arbitrary recommendations. In addition to the carefully presented practical information, especially valuable chapters deal with "Social Aspects of Diabetes" and "Living with Diabetes: Attitudes and Expectations," with straight-forward discussion of sensitive problems such as the use of alcohol, the prognosis for life in diabetes, and the problems of vascular complications.

This handbook will be especially satisfying to the intelligent patient who is genuinely interested in learning as much as he can about his condition. Its mature approach should appeal to this kind of patient more than that of any other handbook currently available. Many medical students could read it with profit. In fact, the only significant drawback of the book is that it occasionally reaches above the level of even the rather sophisticated layman.

The book is almost perfectly free from minor factual misstatements, but not quite: Lente insulin is described in several places as being "clear."

A MANUAL OF DIABETES FOR THE HOUSE OFFICER. By William T. Nunes, Major, Medical Corps. Charles C Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1963.

While the author must have recognized the impossibility of adequately scanning the vast spectrum of diabetes in ninety-one pages of text plus twelve more pages of "final examination," he was so earnestly pedantic in the desire to inculcate the fundamentals to house officers that he succeeded in producing a reasonably acceptable though concentrated outline.

The book was adapted from lectures and is frequently (and unfortunately) in the first person. While many of the personal "asides" are probably charming *in vivo*, they are much less devastating in the written word. The author, who grants "with a grain of salt" permission in the foreword, apparently blends his teaching with generous portions of humor, philosophy and dogma. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of unsupported dogma. These include statements like (page four) "a normal fasting blood sugar is never encountered in the unstable diabetic." This, of course, deserves the oblivion that all "never" statements deserve. More whimsy is found on page seven: "A patient may walk up a flight of stairs between each blood drawing and produce a spurious tolerance curve." On the other hand, there are many useful items of considerable merit such as the statement (page fifteen): "There is no clear-cut relation between insulin requirement and the severity of diabetes mellitus"; the admonition (page twenty-four) concerning the futility of urinalysis done as the major means of diabetic control; (page three) a warning that the greater the mass of injected insulin, the longer the duration of action; and the observation (page eighty-seven) that "the obese hyperglycemic patient is resistant to exogenous insulin even in rather large doses."

There are also some examples of wishful thinking such as

(page twenty-nine), "Insulin is seldom, if ever, necessary for control *if dietary restriction is imposed*," and some of frank errors or misstatements as when on page forty-three we read that the combination of sulfonylureas with insulin should not be used "unless it improves the over-all diabetic control." The fact is that this combination is generally useless, adds to the cost and complicates treatment. It is also doubtful that roughly 90 per cent of all diabetics will respond to sulfonylurea control (page forty). An important omission is the use of biguanide combined with a sulfonylurea. The chapter on diet is an abortive attempt to simplify an awkward and difficult topic. The "rules of thumb" for insulin use (page thirty-eight) are useful but could use some amendment. For example, NPH or Lente *alone* is not useful with unstable diabetics. The 2:1 ratio of Regular with Protamine Zinc Insulin is now rarely used. Lente insulin *can* be mixed with Regular, and pre-lunch testing is a useful gauge of the need for additive Crystalline or Regular Insulin.

The author is apparently a charter member of the Anti-Obesity Club and much time is spent on this worthy endeavor. In all, his is an interesting and informative book written in a highly personal and whimsical style. It is not for the serious student of diabetes, but in spite of minor errors and variances from accepted opinion, it can be useful as an introduction for house officers and, after all, this was the author's intent.

NEUROENDOCRINOLOGY. By Ernst and Berta Scharrer. \$8.50, 304 pp., Columbia University Press, New York, 1963.

This monograph provides an elegant view of comparative neuroendocrinology, touching, often in great detail, on findings in worms, insects, fish, amphibia, reptiles, birds, lower mammals, and man.

The anatomic and functional relationships which provide the basis of neuroendocrinology are elaborated as a background for the description or an understanding of a welter of phenomena and laboratory effects in invertebrates and vertebrates including moulting, starvation, dehydration, growth, development, sexual behavior, reproduction, lactation, stress and others mediated by or affecting neuroendocrine function. Their own studies of the neurosecretion of vasopressin and oxytocin are presented unobtrusively in a survey of the total knowledge of this subspecialty.

Perhaps too much effort is spent in introducing the subject of feedback and in providing diagrams of relationships but these may well reflect the origins of the volume: The Jesup Lectures presented at Columbia University.

The style is fluid, largely because the comments are descriptive and deal with principles rather than minutiae. Quiet, even delicate, humor is not lacking. When details and further explanation are required, footnotes are used on the pertinent page. The index is unusual in that the subentries are arranged in their order of appearance rather than alphabetically, but it appears to be effective.

The volume will appeal to endocrinologists, clinicians, and laboratory workers interested in placing their specific activities into this larger frame of reference.