

## There Should Be a National American Diabetes Association Program for Diabetes Screening

The two articles in the May 1994 issue of *Diabetes Care* about screening for diabetes were excellent and very appropriate (1, 2). A national program for screening is long overdue.

Why is there no national program? The background is very unfortunate in my mind. Many affiliates were carrying out varied screening programs in the 1960s and 70s, resulting in a quasi-national program, albeit disorganized and diverse. Some of the programs were good, others not so. Certain members of the American Diabetes Association (ADA) evaluated the poor programs and on this basis, in the early 80s, bitterly denounced all screening on two bases: 1) there were too many false-positives, which generated unwarranted fear in those tested, and 2) the yield was too low to justify the man power and expenditures required. (This was because some affiliates screened indiscriminately rather than emphasizing high-risk groups.)

Considering the present "state of the art" compared with that of over 30 years ago, I feel that our efforts (3) indicate that good screening was being carried out in the past.

There should be a national program for screening, and it is long overdue. But where would the man power come from? The program could be carried out at the local level by ADA chapters, provided that four criteria are met: 1) there must be standard procedures and well-defined glucose values (the earlier work by Harris et al. [4] in 1979 is a milestone in this respect); 2) adequate professional supervision must administer and oversee the program; 3) compilation of results and conclusions should be carried out by

a coordinating body of the national ADA; and 4) the program should be under the able guidance of Harris and Modan.

The plea by Harris and Modan (1, 2) for a national ADA screening program should be followed up.

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### References

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3. Fox RE, Roberts HK, Oppenheimer HE, Goldenberg S, Bettonville PJ, Mahe GA: A report on diabetes detection. *J Am Med Assoc* 182:622-625, 1962
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## Osler and His Students

The "sweet pea" episode

In the introduction to his book *A Year With Osler*, Joseph H. Pratt, who relates his experiences with William Osler during the 1896-1897 academic year, alludes briefly to the fact that the latter's students once wore sweet peas to a diabetes lecture (1). Unfortunately, Pratt's few words fail to convey the lighthearted collegiality that made this brief episode so

memorable. The reader may even wonder why he mentions it at all.

Luckily, however, Dr. Pratt's is not the only extant description of the "sweet pea episode." In a recently discovered letter written in 1952, Dr. Richard Rand, a 1900 graduate of Johns Hopkins who went on to serve as house officer there (2), relates the same story to a friend. We learn from Rand's account that the final laugh was not on Osler, but on the chairman of surgery, William Halsted:

[The lecture] was held in the surgical amphitheatre—all the class was there, and all wore sweet peas. Dr. Osler came in, on time, looked around, and had a good laugh.

Just then Dr. Halsted drifted in, looked around, and this colloquy [sic] followed:

Dr. Halsted: "What's going on Osler?"  
Dr. Osler: "We are having a symposium on diabetes."

Dr. Halsted: "Why all the flowers?"  
General laughter—exit Dr. Halsted.

I know because it was my class; so I remember the flowers—but not much of diabetes! (R. Rand, unpublished letter, 16 June 1952)

This little story held such tremendous personal meaning for Rand that he remembered it with fondness over 50 years later. Perhaps the fact that the rather taciturn Halsted was the butt of the joke made it especially memorable.

The "sweet pea episode" provides a glimpse at the early days of the Johns Hopkins Medical School and the mutual love and respect that pupil and teacher held for each other. No doubt Osler, as Chairman of Medicine, set the tone for this camaraderie (3), rare, then as it is now. Would that we, as diabetes educators, conveyed an atmosphere in our own institutions equally as jovial!

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