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Presidential Address

Presidential Remarks*

JOHN R. HILL, M.D.

Rochester, Minnesota

SEVENTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO, Doctor Joseph M. Mathews and 12 of his medical colleagues brought forth, in Columbus, Ohio, the Society of which we are now so pleased to be members. Progress of the Society, and consequently of our Specialty, with which there has always been a close relationship, has often been painfully slow during those 78 years. Yet, in the more than 30 years of my association with both Specialty and Society, I am certain that I have seen significant advances in a number of ways. My opinions are obviously biased by my own experiences, but I am confident that in the main they are based on reality.

It is agreed that our Society has been fortunate from the beginning in that it was founded by a group of surgeons who had lofty ideals, and it has continued to be for-

fortunate in always having a nucleus of members who have been devoted not only to maintaining high standards, but also to improving them at every opportunity. Moreover, we are lucky that this nucleus of dedicated members has grown somewhat, because the problems to be solved for our Specialty have also become more complex.

During the next few minutes I will mention what I believe the principal achievements of this Society for our Specialty have been and then speak briefly of matters that concern the Council of the Society today. In doing this I will not attempt to keep things in chronological order, or in order of importance.

The achievements to which I have alluded are as follows. We have gone a long way toward rescuing the Specialty from the quacks — from reading the writings of our founding fathers I know this to have been one of their foremost goals; we have up-

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graded gradually and significantly the qualifications of our members; we have increased the number of approved training programs from 10 in 1950 to 22 in 1976; we have established a Certifying Board, a considerable achievement, especially when one considers the number of more glamorous surgical specialties that have not yet done so; we have succeeded in defining the limits of our Specialty to the extent that it is now generally understood that it includes abdominal colorectal surgery as well as anorectal surgery; we have brought to our meetings a greatly increased number of interested persons from the general surgical and other fields of medicine; we have our own Journal, which I can personally attest is becoming more and more popular with medical writers; and, last but by no means least, we have a central Administrative Office which, to a large extent, has been responsible for maintaining continuity in the operations of the Society. One is tempted to name the persons responsible for such advances, but I will not attempt to do so because I would be almost sure to omit one or more names of importance since all advances were the results of ongoing projects requiring years to accomplish. I must admit that these accomplishments do not seem very remarkable in the light of 78 years, but I would point out that most have come about during the last 25–30 years. At any rate, these achievements, in addition to the conscientious practice of medicine by all of us, have resulted in our Specialty's being established in the minds of the public; this, perhaps, will have more to do with where we go from here than will anything else.

I am no seer, nor have I been involved extensively with the political side of medicine. However, it seems clear to me, as I imagine it does to all of you, that the practice of medicine will change rapidly and remarkably during the next few years. One of the greatest assets of our Specialty is that it is well represented in the important

arenas of organized medicine by highly competent and highly motivated men; I am confident that it will continue to be so represented. We must not forget, however, that time marches on and that the members who are now doing these jobs so skillfully cannot continue to do them indefinitely. I have been highly gratified by the number of younger members who have volunteered their services during this past year. It has been my sincere desire to have as many of you as possible involved in the affairs of this Society. I have no doubt that my successors will feel the same way so, for your own sakes as well as for the good of the Society, please don't be shy about letting it be known that you are willing to lend a hand.

One thing that has always impressed me about this Society is the friendliness of its members, a characteristic that I think has improved through the years in spite of the gradual but considerable increase in members. Yet, I believe that most of our older members would agree that there have, at times, been hints of factionalism in the group. While competition is good and while disagreement is inevitable when medical men get together, one thing that this Society cannot afford is having one faction pitted against another. Needless to say, but I will say it anyway, the efforts of everyone are required if our progress is to continue. We must conserve our energies in order to be able to cope not only with the remarkable advances in the practice of medicine but also with the rapid advances in the politics of medicine. I had the pleasure of serving on the Council of this Society from 1960 through 1962, and by happenstance I retained the agenda for one of the Council's meetings that took place during that time. A few of the matters with which we must deal in our Council meetings now that were essentially unheard of then are self-assessment, continuing education, peer review, recertification, and distribution and

possible limitation of manpower (by the latter is meant the covering of more territory with what we already consider to be an insufficient number of people in our Specialty). This comparison affords an idea of the changes that have taken place during the last 15 years. We all can imagine the problems that will arise during the next 5 to 10 years in attempting to deal with these relatively new facets of medical practice. Those that I have just mentioned remain largely unresolved, and with new ones coming up it is obvious that there is still much work to be done. It's apparent, also, that the "dedicated few" to whom I have

alluded will have to increase to the "dedicated many" in the relatively near future. It's well that we can point to past achievements, for they can serve to bolster the courage of those of you who will deal with the situations that are rapidly arising.

In conclusion, I wish to thank you all for the honor of letting me serve as your President. I can assure you that it has been an enlightening as well as an interesting experience. I am especially indebted to the Council members, the Committee members, the Administrative Office, and all others who have worked diligently to make this a successful year.