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Marriage and Medical Training

Abstract

The late Professor Ian Aird held that 'it is an advantage (for the young surgeon) if he can remain single until the later years of his training'. Sir Henry Wade once stated that 'a young surgeon must keep his affections in cold storage'. This is remarkably like the attitude of St. Paul so long ago.

"I say therefore to the unmarried and widows it is a good thing for them if they abide even as I
. . . . but if they cannot contain, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn." (1 Corinthians 7, 8 & 9).

In spite of the viewpoint of these eminent men, the proportion of doctors who marry young is increasing, as is the number of medical students who are married before the end of their course.

Is this crass stupidity on the part of students and young doctors? Is it a transient phenomenon of no importance? Or is it an understandable trend which does not carry disastrous consequences?

Without a detailed analysis of the motivations and consequences of this trend, comment is necessarily based on personal observation. It is hoped that this nevertheless has validity.

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MARRIAGE AND MEDICAL TRAINING

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A number of factors are probably involved. The average age of marrying has been falling in this country at a time at which the duration of medical training is extending. With increased grants more students are financially independent of parental support. Society is probably less demanding in its material requirements for marriage. The spouse must, of course, realise

the full implications of such a marriage; the lack of money, usually rented flats, the compulsory hospital residence. There is a feeling that doctors should be free to live a more normal existence. General Practitioners negotiate for a new 'charter', the junior hospital staff demand better working conditions and adequate remuneration. Similarly senior medical students and young doctors may wish to marry. Some marry, of course, because they are compelled to.

The idea that marriage brings in its wake a decline in standards must be firmly refuted. The demands of home life are usually no greater than drinking in the Union or endless parties. A number of married students express the feeling that they are more settled, responsible and capable of work after than before marriage.

Does any particular type of student get married? Looking around at the present married students it is impossible to define them as a group. They comprise a range of students, extravert and introvert, athletic and aesthetic, the highly intelligent and the less intelligent.

In Scandinavia and the U.S.A. these 'early' marriages are more common than here, yet there does not appear to have been a disastrous decline in standards of students and young doctors. In this country it should be clearly recognised that the fact that a student is prepared to undertake the responsibility of marriage does not preclude adequate academic performance nor does it preclude competence as a doctor. Perhaps eminent men in the future, rather than recommending that a young doctor "keep his affections in cold storage", will advise that he keep his affections in a more normal, proper place appropriate to the reasonable, responsible and well-balanced person that the young doctor should be.

BOOK REVIEWS

EXPLORATION MEDICINE. O. G. Edholm. A. L. Bacharade, Editors. John Wright & Sons, 46/- P.410.

More and more expeditions are being sent overseas to remote places. It is the fashion of these expeditions to be small and self-sufficient, often without the services of a qualified medical officer. It is for such expeditions as these that this book is primarily intended.

It is no great co-incidence that many of the contributions to this book are from the armed

services which is familiar with many of the problems faced by small groups of men in remote and isolated places.

It sets out to deal, chapter by chapter, with all the medical conditions and emergencies likely to confront an expedition medical officer, and it does this in clear and workmanlike fashion. The scope of the book is wide and includes not only the care of the injured but the problems of survival in varying climates and conditions both on land and at sea. It also deals with the prevention of disease and injury and the mental health of the leaders and members of an expedition.

As a comprehensive account of expedition medicine this book succeeds admirably. It also