

1965

PRELIMINARY REMARKS PROJECTING THE 1965 POSITION OF NMA WITH REFERENCE TO LIAISON EFFORTS WITH AMA TO IMPROVE THE PROBLEMS OF DISCRIMINATION IN MEDICINE

Since the turn of the century, 65 years ago, there have been efforts on the part of the officers of the National Medical Association to remove the principal cause or reason for the origin and development of the NMA - viz., discriminatory practices against qualified physicians because of race. For at least 25 years, there has been utilized off and on the concept of liaison meetings between representatives of the NMA and the AMA to iron out differences between the two organizations as to what the AMA may or should do toward eliminating the barrier of basic memberships in the AMA and its Constituent and Component Societies. This practice has been carried out by constitutional requirement in the South and some border states and by tactful permissibility on the part of the general organization. To a lesser degree, these liaison groups have been concerned with discriminatory practices in medical education, hospital appointments, discriminatory practices against Negro patients and the perpetuation of the segregated image in medicine. I am recalling historically the many conferences and heated protests required to eliminate the printing of COL behind the name of Negro physicians in the AMA directory. I recall the early days of my practice when I would receive medical advertisements addressed to "Colonel Berry," and how such a glorious error expanded my ego and how suddenly it was burst or exploded when the grim reality was known. I mention this only as "humor in retrospect." And I would pray that in a few years the more weighty problems of racial discrimination in medicine may be looked upon also with "humor in retrospect." When that day comes I would like to feel that with

a sincere and mutual respect for the essential dignity of its members and peers, organized medicine will have played the principal role of leadership in these accomplishments.

As we gather here today on this 27th day of September 1965 to reactivate our talks, we should be encouraged and hopeful by the very fact of our assembly. Since our conferences were broken off about 2½ years ago, the tide of history has brought about tremendous changes in the climate of human relations and medical practice for all of America. Our Liaison Committees have changed personnel and personalities. It is against the backdrop of these great changes and within the glaring light of reality that we must face our serious responsibilities to our respective Societies with their overlapping memberships, our responsibilities to our fellow physicians everywhere, and our fellow citizens - the patients. The needs of courage, leadership to correct deep-seated wrongs and to evaluate personal rights against human rights can now be reconsidered in the new atmosphere and with the legislative leverage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964-'65 if there is really sincerity in the aims and goals of our present Liaison Committee members.

There are many aspects of recently passed and pending legislation regarding medical practice and medical services for all of our great nation, which for one reason or another has not had the benefit of consultation by a broad segment of physicians and other health service personnel who, after all, are essentially - if not primarily - concerned.

In helping to steer the course of implementation of new health laws and, hopefully, to help in the direction of pending

legislation, organized medicine can and must effectively close ranks by bringing into the fold thousands of physicians - black and white - who have been rejected or alienated by entrenched racial and socio-economic discriminatory practices of our modern culture inherited from the beliefs and practices of our forebears.

We may not be able to stop the tide of history, but together we may learn more effectively how to get in the swim for the continuing mutual benefit of patient and doctor in our great nation.

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