

Department-of-Surgery



News Letter

Vol. 1

February 5, 1957

No. 12

THE SURGICAL RESEARCH LABORATORY

(Part III)

The Halsted Laboratory was established in name and in fact in 1946. It consisted of three small rooms and a closet; twelve dogs could be housed in the run assigned. There was no equipment, no personnel, and no operating budget. Before its establishment not one research publication had originated from the Department of Surgery of the University of Colorado. On its tenth birthday, the laboratory and its associated facilities, include a large operating room, fully equipped and with adequate service areas, a chemistry laboratory, an endocrine laboratory, a physiological laboratory, a library-conference room, a fluoroscopy room and three offices. One hundred and thirty-five dogs reside in its kennels, and others are boarded out; a mouse room is full. Two nurses, two dieners, a laboratory assistant, and four laboratory technicians are helping three residents, two research fellows, a research associate, two foreign research fellows, and two student fellows pursue a busy research program, with guidance and stimulus from seven members of the faculty. The operative log showed 868 procedures; publications from the laboratory for the year numbered 13. The top award of the A.M.A. for a research exhibit hangs on its wall.

It is one of the major administrative headaches of the Department that this important and complex phase of its operations leads a hand-to-mouth existence, supported primarily by what might be termed "soft" money, i.e., term grants which must be renewed each year with no surety that the support will continue. In essence, it must earn its way by the quantity and quality of the research it produces. Produce or wither has its good points, of course, but also its evils. And there are tense moments! Within the last year, for example, the ledgers were in the red and the salaries of four key long-term employees (and also the projects they man) were precariously hanging on the outcome of a single application. That letter was opened on the 29th of the month and if it said "no", there was no salary money for the next month in the till. Life shouldn't be like that if the best results are to be achieved in research. There must be some sense of continuity, of security to proceed with carefully planned attacks on the problem. Research seldom can be achieved in isolated units -

neat packages you can sell this year so you can eat the next. Pressure to produce "pay-off" projects is fundamentally bad. Having the laboratory in the position of a self-supporting research institute tends to disturb its proper relationship to the Department as a whole. We desperately need more "hard" money in research, money that can be relied upon, money that is solid and dependable, i.e., money from endowment, from basic medical school or hospital budget, or long-term commitments from a granting agency.

But the problem is that modern research is expensive! The current research budget for the Department approximates \$75,000 a year. Of this the Medical School contributes about \$10,000, but this is primarily for personnel and is solidly geared to the teaching functions of the laboratory. Alone it would produce no answers to any scientific inquiry; it merely helps to buttress the structure of what must be added in order to achieve such answers. The additional need is equivalent to 4% interest on a million six hundred thousand dollar endowment. Any suggestions on how to achieve this for just one Department of the University of Colorado School of Medicine?

Henry Swan, M.D.

- - - - -
TRAVEL WEARY

In January, Dr. Swan took two of his too many trips. One involved a two day session in Washington for the meeting of the Surgery Study Section of the U. S. Public Health Service, a visit to Philadelphia for a session with a research equipment manufacturer, and a tour of the Veteran's Administration Hospitals in the sub-area for which he is Surgical Consultant: - 4,300 miles, six days of work, a ten-day trip. Later in the month, a weed-end in San Antonio with two talks for their Heart Association. These are not atypical of some of the obligations which tend to pull him away from the wards and the laboratory; but two of these jobs are for Uncle Sam, of which one helps get research money, one was to promote a specific research project, and the other was to present experimental and clinical experience from the University of Colorado. Next week, off again for 8 days. This time to help on the program of a regional meeting of the American College of Surgeons in New Orleans, to present the results of two year's study of steroid metabolism in hypothermia to the University Surgeons in Columbus, and to attend a meeting of the Committee on Trauma of the United States Army at Brooke General Hospital. The first two also involve a search for a new staff member; the last named committee has been giving us a \$25,000 a year contract for research. A professor's obligations these days tend to make him a salesman, a solicitor, and a public servant, all on the dead run. It's hard work, pays little, helps boost Colorado, but where to draw the line is the problem!

SKIIER'S BARGAIN

The Northwestern Medical Association is said to be a bona fide medical

group with serious interest in regional professional problems. Its meeting is always held in Sun Valley in mid-winter (this year February 12-14). The trip is deductible. Attendance at this year's meeting, however, might entail the penalty of having to listen to a paper on "The Effect of Hypothermia on Infection," by a well known Chief of the Surgical Section of a large local Veteran's Administration Hospital.

COMMENT PLEASE

This issue of the Department of Surgery "Newsletter" completes one year's effort. Volume I is hereby closed. The Letter was started with the thought that it might serve two purposes: first, as a medium of news of activities of the many members of its faculty; and second, as a vehicle of communication to bring some of the beliefs, objectives, and problems of the Department to each member of the staff. Is it worthwhile? Do you read it? We have had little comment. The editorial effort involved is not inconsiderable, and we want to know whether to continue with it. Attached, herewith, is a ballot -- please fill it out, splurge yourself to a 3¢ stamp, and mail to: NEWSLETTER, Department of Surgery, 4200 East 9th Avenue.

- - - - -