

EDITORIAL

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THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

It would be most premature to draw any sweeping conclusions from this scourge with our present data, although many features of interest already are presenting themselves. Since Pfeiffer's discovery of the Gram-negative organism bearing his name and attributed by him as having causal relation to the disease, the scientific world has taken his contention for granted. The bacteriologic investigations of this latest pandemic, drawn from many parts of the civilized world, are far from being in accord respecting the nature of the infective agent. Those observers reporting the isolation of the Pfeiffer organism have for the most part found it mixed with many other varieties, such as various types of streptococci, pneumococci, micrococcus catarrhalis, and even spirochætes. By some it has been found in the lungs at autopsy, but was not discoverable in the sputum. Many observers have failed to locate it in either place, but instead report most commonly some member of the streptococcus-pneumococcus group. Even Pfeiffer himself is alleged to have failed in its isolation from cases of this epidemic. Nicolle is reported to have found a filtrable virus with which he reproduced the condition in monkeys, while Rosenau has failed in attempts in this direction. Such diversity of opinion can only place the ætiology of the condition *sub judice* for the time being, but in addition it causes Pfeiffer's original contention to be scrutinized more closely.

Briefly, his evidence lies mainly in the isolation of a small Gram-negative cocco-bacillus from the sputum of a large number of cases, in some of which it was found in pure culture.

But it should be noted that attempts to reproduce the condition in animals was not particularly successful. The ætiologic status of this organism is comparable to that of *B. suispestifer* in its supposed relation to hog-cholera, before it was conclusively shown that a filtrable virus was the actual cause of the condition.

If we carry this analogy further we might hypothecate that influenza is induced by an unknown infective agent, and complicated according to circumstance with such secondary infections as *B. influenzae*, streptococci, pneumococci, or some other organism. Not only would such a conception be comparable with what we know to be true in hog-cholera, but also with what we conjecture to be true in scarlet fever and measles. It cannot be said with finality, therefore, that we have isolated the infective agent — in fact, it would seem that we have *not* done so.

Still more discouraging is the inability of the profession to treat the disease. It is yet to be shown that vaccins have any value, either prophylactically or therapeutically, although claims for their efficiency are not lacking. Vaccins thus far used have consisted of pure cultures of influenza bacilli as well as of mixtures of this organism with various other ones already mentioned. The uncertainty associated with the possible ætiologic rôle of any known organisms makes their employment in vaccins an empirical procedure. Apparently good effects resulting from their use in some cases may be non-specific after the manner of non-specific protein injections in rheumatism.

Among the many therapeutic agents used, one hears little of homœopathic treatment, but in this city (Rochester, N. Y.) the impression prevails in some quarters that patients on the whole have fared better under homœopathic than under "regular" treatment. Three men claim that of three hundred and seventy-five odd cases under their care, no deaths have resulted, and a very low percentage of pneumonias occurred. It may be argued that we do not know how many of these cases were true influenza and how many just common colds, but it is fair to assume that in the midst of a raging epidemic a generous percentage of them conformed to the clinical entity known as influenza. One leading allopathic physician reported a mortality of 25–40 per cent of his cases, under 40 drop doses of the tincture of digitalis every four hours. We may conjecture, if we do not know, that such dosage is the result either of ignorance or a hysterical state of mind resulting from a consciousness of therapeutic impotence.

These instances are not related for the purpose of drawing conclusions nor for the purpose of holding a brief at this time for the superiority of any form of therapy, be it vaccins, con-

valescents' serum, or drugs; but the opportunity is presented for those treating large numbers of cases to report their findings, if records were kept. Such a widespread epidemic will make such reports of much greater value than those of a few cases covering several seasons. It is only from thousands of cases that we can finally arrive at some estimate of the worth of the various therapeutic agents employed. It is to be earnestly hoped that the reports will contain the data necessary for their scientific employment, inasmuch as so many case reports must be regarded only as anecdotes.

In conclusion it must be admitted that we know little that is definite and certain at this time regarding either the ætiology or the treatment of influenza.

RALPH R. MELLON.

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

Since writing you about my success in treating influenza, a second epidemic occurred here, during which I treated 105 cases. In this series there were no deaths and no cases of pneumonia. My experience with the two epidemics may, therefore, be summed up as follows:

Total number of cases	293
Cases seen from initial fever and recovering without developing pneumonia	274
Relapsing cases	19
Pneumonia (developing in relapsing cases only)	6
Deaths from influenza and its complications	3

Very sincerely yours,

ARTHUR B. HAWES, M.D.

BRIDGEWATER, S. D.
December 27, 1918.

REVIEWS

HOMŒOPATHIC PERIODIC LITERATURE

The Clinique, October, 1918

1. *X-ray treatment of fibroid tumors.* 409. Grubbe, E. H.

Conclusions:

"X-ray treatment of uterine fibroids is, when properly carried out, a safe and efficient method of treatment.

"The danger incident to surgical operation need not be considered when the patient is under X-ray treatment. With modern methods all danger has been eliminated.

"Hæmorrhage, usually the chief symptom of uterine fibroids, can be controlled by this treatment.