

EDITORIAL

HUMAN GENETICS AND THE TEACHING OF MEDICINE

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The progress of human genetics in the past few years has indeed been remarkable. Not too long ago words like «hereditary» or «familial» were taken as meaning something mysterious about the condition to which they were attached. Today not only these but sophisticated words like chromosomal aberrations, translocations, and non-disjunctions are rapidly becoming words of daily use. Articles with pictures of chromosomes are seen more and more frequently in almost every leading journal. The number of periodicals devoted to genetics is on the rise. Despite these advances, genetics still has not been recognized by many doctors in general practice. This could be achieved by refresher courses for practicing physicians, especially those in pediatrics and obstetrics, as well as in general practice. However, probably the best approach is to introduce the subject in some detail in undergraduate courses. It is no doubt clear that any person intending to follow one of the biological disciplines must have a minimal knowledge of genetics. In this respect medical students especially should be exposed to a certain amount of genetics to facilitate their understanding of diseases, since genes are at the basis of life and influence the functions of the living organism. When students are furnished with a basic knowledge of genetics, it seems safe to hope that they will keep on having an interest in genetics in their chosen field.

We as pediatricians have more reason to have a deep interest in genetics because the syndrome which results from chromosome aberrations is usually referred to pediatricians and many of those patients do not live beyond childhood. The same holds true for patients, whose diseases are classified as inborn errors of metabolism.

Our pediatric department, appreciating all these points, delegated me to join a splendid course in Copenhagen, sponsored by the World Health Organization, and the Institute of Human Genetics

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in Copenhagen. Under the directorship of Dr. M. Hauge, eleven doctors from many countries were exposed to most of the basic knowledge in genetics as well as its most advanced clinical applications.

Soon after my return I was asked by the basic science department of the Medical School as well as my own pediatrics department to have more emphasis placed on genetics in the current teaching of the medical students as well as for the pediatric residents.

The Medical School shows so much understanding of the importance of this work that they have assigned a special part of the new university building for cytogenetics work. Very encouraged by this approach to the importance of the problem by the administration, I am hoping that we will be able to contribute to the solution of many clinical problems as well as carry our share of the teaching of this subject.