Chapter XVII

The Medical School Sodality

For over thirty years, from at least the early 1930's until 1966, the Medical School Sodality was a viable organization at the School of Medicine. Dedicated to the Blessed Mother, its purpose was to enhance the spiritual life of its members and to enable them to approach the study and practice of medicine with a firm grounding in Catholic morality. After a lapse during World War II, the Sodality was reorganized in 1947. Over the years, the Sodality, led by an elected Student Prefect, performed many and varied service functions, in addition to promoting its members' spiritual well-being through prayer services, monthly Communion breakfasts, special Masses and Benedictions. For example, in 1933 the Medical Mission Board was organized within the Sodality to collect medical equipment and supplies for the foreign missions. In 1934 a twenty-five member choir was formed from within its ranks, led by Adolph J. Bellantoni (M.D. 1936) and accompanied by Frank Frangohandiera (M.D. 1937). This group sang at every 9:00 Sunday Mass at St. John's, and after weekly rehearsals, was hoping to present solos, duets and quartets as part of their programs. By 1964 the emphasis was placed on guest speakers, giving members insight into the synthesis of medicine and morality that was to be their goal. After 1966 there is no further mention of the Medical School Sodality. Presumably a lack of members forced their dissolution.

Honor Societies

Three major honor societies have existed at Creighton, to which medical students have aspired over the years. Two of them are still extant.

Alpha Omega Alpha is a national honor medical society which dates to 1902. Creighton's chapter, Beta, was installed on April 25, 1957. Membership in the society, whose motto is "Worthy to serve the suffering" is awarded for scholarship, personal honesty, and potential leadership in the field of medicine. Alpha Omega Alpha is ongoing.

Alpha Sigma Nu, the national Jesuit honor society, was established at Creighton for men in 1921 to recognize outstanding scholarship, loyalty and service. Each division of the University, including the School of Medicine, selects two students for membership. Although the society was allowed to lapse during the World War II years, it was reorganized the fall of 1948. On March 31, 1973, Gamma Pi Epsilon, the Jesuit Honorary for women, merged with Alpha Sigma Nu, and since then the latter has been the Creighton Catholic honor society for both men and women.
Much Work And Less Play...

Gamma Pi Epsilon, the feminine equivalent of Alpha Sigma Nu, was started in 1924 and brought to Creighton in 1952. As mentioned, in 1973 it merged with Alpha Sigma Nu, into which both men and women are now accepted.

Publications of the School of Medicine

At various points in its history, the School of Medicine has sanctioned specialized publications by and for the medical community at Creighton. These instruments have generally combined scholarly articles of a technical nature, newsworthy current affairs affecting those in some way affiliated with the School of Medicine, and chatty tidbits about students and alumni. Most of these publications involved students in their preparation, although the most scholarly and ambitious, The Bulletin of the Creighton University School of Medicine (which changed its name to The Journal of the Creighton University School of Medicine in 1949) was primarily a faculty production. The publications have included the following:

The Creighton Medical College Bulletin, was published from September 1897 through April 1904, possibly longer. One lone volume has been located: September 1903-April 1904, Volume 7, No. 1-8. The publication stated it was "issued monthly during college term in the interest of the student, the Creighton Medical College, and the profession." Therefore the first volume must have been for the 1897-1898 school term. This publication, which sold for 15 cents a copy or $1.00 for a yearly subscription, was an effective mix. It contained local advertising, both business and professional, scholarly articles of medical interest, generally by faculty, and student papers on technical topics. It also ran a College News section, sometimes divided by class year, which was chatty and amusing, and another entitled Alumni Notes, which provided updates (and gossip) on graduates. Other tidbits were sporadically thrown in—a poem one month, a section on rooms to rent another ("Steam Heated Rooms, 610 So 17th Avenue, $7.00 per month"). On the editorial staff were five medical students and a faculty member, Dr. Rudolph Rix (M.D. 1899), who served as Alumni Editor.

The Bulletin of the Creighton University School of Medicine was first published November 1, 1940. As stated in the Preliminary copy issued a few months earlier, the purpose of the Bulletin will be to acquaint the alumni with the activities of the faculty by printing short abstracts of papers, addresses given before scientific and medical societies and preliminary reports of research in progress. News items of particular interest to the alumni will also be included.

Volume 1 of the scholarly Bulletin, published four times a year and under the direction of a five man Editorial Board, was unpolished, looking like a typed manuscript which had been mimeographed and bound (this was probably the case.) Volume II, beginning November 1941, illustrated a dramatic change in format. Professionally printed, it included a table of contents and also a new section, Library Notes, listing recent purchases and donations to the medical library. Its Editor-in-Chief, Cleveland S. Simpkins, served in this capacity until February 1947 when Dr. Richard L. Egan (M.D. 1940) replaced him. In February 1948 the publication went to a smaller, more compact format, increasing its professional appearance.

In 1949 the name was changed to The Journal of the Creighton University School of Medicine. The number of articles, though each slightly longer, were fewer in
number, and the publication became more brief in total for the remainder of its life. After a two-year lapse from 1951 to 1953, the January 1953 issue appeared. It reported:

After a lapse of 2 years, the Journal of the Creighton University School of Medicine is resuming publication... The Editorial Committee is desirous of expressions as to the functions of the Journal from as many alumni as possible. These suggestions will serve as the basis for the preparation of future numbers of The Journal.54

As it happened, there were no future numbers. The Journal ceased to be published, possibly from lack of interest or finances.

The Creighton University Health Science News began publication in February 1980. This ongoing quarterly newspaper, though not a publication of the School of Medicine, informs the Creighton community of events pertinent to the Health Science schools on the Creighton campus.

Medical Student Newspapers - There have been two newspapers prepared and published by Creighton medical students. The first was named The Bat and began in October 1967. Arrhythmia began publication in November 1970, changed to a magazine format in 1979, then went to a more abbreviated newsletter layout. It lasted at least through the 1985 school year, but is not currently published.

Medical Student Yearbooks - Two classes of medical students are known to have published yearbooks or senior annuals. The first publication known is The John A. Creighton Medical College Senior Annual of 1904. The other is MD Creighton by the class of 1973.

The 1904 volume is quite personal, containing among the more serious articles a class poem and a class prognosis. Both of these poke fun at class members by name. For example, a section of the class poem referring to Frederick A. Nelson, M.D. 1904, reads:

Dad Nelson, elderly, but sprightly, On whom his ban of years rests lightly, Advances with voluptuous, sylph-like grace, And the hairs upon his head Are outnumbered, it is said, Ten to one by those that grace his grotesque face.170
The Class Prognosis predicts the following in reference to David A. Hewitt, M.D. 1904:

Hewitt will dauntlessly plunge into the shackles of matrimony. He will be an indulgent husband and a numerous father. He will kiss his wife every time he goes out, and the hired girl every time his wife goes out.¹⁷

MD 1973 was the initiative of James M. Carlson (M.D. 1973), who began recording his medical school experience in photographs from his first day as a freshman. In the hundreds of photos and the engaging text accompanying them, he captured the essence of the four-year adventure that was medical school, specifically medical school at Creighton.

The Caducean Society

The Caducean Society was an organization whose purpose was to cultivate an interest in the history of medicine. Named after the caduceus, the symbol of physicians, it was founded by Dr. Charles M. Wilhelm in 1931, who served as its first moderator. It also placed emphasis on appreciation of cultural pursuits such as art, music and literature. In 1939 it became affiliated with the American Association for the History of Medicine, becoming "the only one of its kind in the middle West," according to the Bluejay.¹⁸ It also had affiliation with The American Association for the Advancement of Science.

At meetings, papers of historical interest were presented and speakers were featured. Membership requirements apparently changed with time. In 1935 membership was limited to thirty, who were included by invitation only.¹⁹ In 1943 students who desired membership had to research and present to the Society a paper of suitable topic.²⁰ By 1955 The Bulletin noted that membership was open to anyone interested.²¹

The Society was allowed to lapse during World War II and lost its affiliation with the American Association of the History of Medicine. This was rectified in February 1947 when the Society was revived and reorganized. The duration of this revival is unknown, but a reference in the Bluejay in January 1954 announced that the Caducean Society had been revived the previous year, 1953, and was again trying to reestablish itself with the national group.²² This second attempt at revitalization also must have failed, for after a reference to the organization in a September 1955 Bulletin, nothing more is heard about the group.

Journal/Study Clubs

Part of the medical school experience for many has been membership in one of the groups that have been organized to delve deeper into some aspect of the study of medicine. Meetings of such groups generally featured speakers, films, discussions and reports of journal research. Sometimes socializing over a meal or refreshments was included. Thus, students could gain medical knowledge and professional contacts in a relaxed, informal atmosphere.
Specific information has been found on a handful of these groups. No doubt many more are not included here, due to lack of published or reported information.

The Creighton Medical Society, extant in 1904, was formed to bring together students and eminent leaders in medicine and surgery. It met monthly "for intellectual gymnastics and also for recreation," and at these meetings original papers were read and discussed, and updates on faculty research were presented. In 1904 there were thirty-two members led by six student officers, one of which was a Mascot. It is not known how long the Society functioned.

The Medical Forum, organized in 1934 "for the purpose of discussing the social, economic and ethical problems in their relation to medicine," the group sponsored by the School of Medicine Regent, held meetings every other week in the evening on some topics that sound surprisingly current even today. State Medicine was debated at one meeting, followed by a discussion of sterilization the next. The Medical Forum existed at least through the 1941 school year, with meetings alternating among the Phi Rho, Phi Beta and Phi Chi fraternity houses.

The Obstetrical and Gynecological Society was a group active in the late 1930's and early 1940's. In 1941 its twin purposes were identified: "to foster interest in the studies of obstetrics and gynaecology and to encourage additional research of new developments in these spheres."

In addition, it served as a preparation for students in the correct manner of presenting scientific papers. The Dr. Frank Murphy Prize was given annually to the student presenting the best paper. In 1941 there were thirty-eight members.

The Journal Club, meeting at noon on Fridays, was organized in early 1939. After a twenty-minute luncheon, the remainder of each meeting was devoted to a discussion of current literature of scientific significance. Faculty speakers were planned for the group as well. It is not known how long this group continued its meetings.

The Surgical Society was organized in January 1940 to give students a greater background in the surgical field. The group, which grew to include eighty-five members in the first year of its existence, held monthly meetings at which journal reviews and discussions were held. Films of actual operations were shown. Faculty surgeons headed the programs. The size of the group is even more significant when it is noted that eligibility was limited to medical juniors and seniors.
The OB/GYN Journal Club had its beginnings in July 1947, with Drs. Thomas H. Foley (M.D. 1940) and W. Riley Kovar (M.D. 1935). These two residents decided that an official means was needed to keep current with OB/GYN literature. Monthly meetings were begun on Saturday mornings at 8:00 A.M. in St. Joseph’s Hospital. Even after combined meetings with University of Nebraska residents were instituted, attendance was low. After deciding the meeting time was their problem, Drs. Maurice Grier (M.D. 1917), Department Chairman of OB/GYN, moved these gatherings to his home at 8:00 P.M.

Since Dr. Grier conducted a large private practice in addition to his duties as head of the Department, the start of many meetings at his home was delayed. "The residents and staff did not complain," it seems, "since Dr. Grier had a well-stocked open bar on a self-serve basis. This tradition established the social hour." The business of journal reviews at these meetings usually didn’t get underway until 9:00, and lasted until midnight or later, after which Mrs. Grier treated those present to a large snack.

It was decided after some time that these meetings were an imposition on the Griers, so a new protocol was established. Meetings were rotated among the homes of OB/GYN staff members, consisting of a 6:30 social hour, followed by dinner and then the literature review, ending at about 10:00. Dr. Kovar noted:

This worked for a while until it was noticed that the dinner prepared by each hostess became more elaborate. It appeared as though the journal Club was becoming a social event along with a cooking contest between the various hostesses. This most pleasurable protocol came to an abrupt ending after one of the hostesses served a 4 or 5 course Italian dinner and a different wine with each course. Current literature was presented by the residents to a very sleepy and uninterested group. Following this, a less elaborate ritual was begun, with meetings held first at the lounge of the St. Joseph Student Nurses’ residence and later in the new St. Joseph Hospital. Meetings are currently held at the Veterans Administration Hospital.

Another study club originated and still conducted by Dr. Egan in The Harrison Club. Began in.
1965, it reviews the popular textbook of medicine, section by section, with appropriate comments, elaboration, and insights by Dr. Egan. He noted that he attempts to make it a social event as well.

**Professional Societies**

All Creighton medical students have belonged to the Creighton medical student government, which has elected class officers annually. In addition, other professional societies have been available for students to join on an optional basis. Among them have been the American Medical Student Association (formerly the Student American Medical Association), the Student National Medical Association, whose goal was to aid both the minority population in health care and minority students aspiring to a medical career; and the American Medical Women’s Association (AMWA), a fairly recent campus addition.

**Organizations for Spouses of Medical Students**

From as early as 1934, an organization composed of spouses of medical students has existed, in addition to the wives’ clubs affiliated with each of the major medical fraternities. First called the Creighton Medical Students’ Wives Club, then Med Wives, in 1960 the name was formally altered to the Creighton Women’s Auxiliary of the Student American Medical Association. Until recent times there were so few women medical students that an organization for spouses of students (translate men and women) was not thought necessary. It is only within the last several years that practice has caught up with reality, and the group’s name became Medical Partners.

Medical school is time consuming and stressful, with its own lingo and its special set of pressures. Marriages and families are affected by the circumstances surrounding the medical student. Spouses’ groups help by providing social activities and an opportunity to mingle and share concerns with others in the same situation.

The Creighton group has had a fluctuating history of activity, at times being very active, and at other times almost dying out. The 1940’s through the 1960’s witnessed the most organized functioning of the organization as changing societal conventions and expectations played a large role in the changing nature of the group. After the 1960’s, women increasingly began to pursue their career aspirations through education and employment, and the time and need to participate in such functions decreased.
In its heyday, the highlight of the year for the Med Wives was its annual Benefit Ball, which began in 1934, the year of the group's inception. Held in February or March of every year, it was usually a formal affair, whose proceeds were donated to the School for clinic equipment or for the building fund. There are records of the dance as late as 1970. Frequently the annual affair had a colorful theme, such as "Circus Daze" in 1956, "Moonlight and Roses" in 1967 and "Arabian Nights" in 1970.162

Students who have reigned as King or Queen Creighton include: Frank Mork (M.D. 1929); Mary Fochtman (M.D. 1932); Robert C. Mugan (M.D. 1935); Richard Lillard (M.D. 1953); Debbie "Smiley" Nagengast (M.D. 1965) and Ronald J. Iljin (M.D. 1981).163

Other activities through the years have included bake sales, weekly visits to nursing homes, an annual Christmas party for underprivileged children, style shows, and the printing of directories and calendars of events for the School of Medicine. Of course, there have been many strictly social events - card parties, dinners, picnics, barbecues and the like.164

In very recent times, the group was allowed to lapse in all but name until about 1989. At this point, a revitalization initiative was undertaken by Liz Havlicek, wife of Russ, a medical student. She said that on a very informal basis, the group has aided in orientation activities for new students' spouses, conducting small social functions to provide friendship and positive encouragement to those in the medical school adventure with their partners.165

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Other Organized Student Activities

Records indicate that medical students, despite their hectic schedules, have managed to involve themselves in a variety of other organized special interest groups. Among the most interesting are the following:

Dancing has been a draw for many medical students. As early as 1903, references are found to The Creighton Medical Dancing Club, which met monthly. The Creighton Medical College Bulletin of November 1903 touts the monthly gatherings as a good way to mingle with girls and to develop social poise:

There is not one among us who does not enjoy the society of the fair sex. Our work in school and out of school tends to promote seclusion. Our society is mostly that of "the boys." We are prone to become a little careless in our dress, our expressions, and our habits. Most of us need a wee bit of feminine association to polish up our harsh edges and soften the roughness. The too-strict adherence to study and the isolation it engenders should be interrupted occasionally. One night in the month is none too much for a good and gentle invigoration.175

Although this 1903 volume complained that more students needed to attend the dances, a report on the Club's first dance of the 1910 season demonstrated that the attendance problem had been solved. The October 17, 1910, dance at Chamber's Dancing Academy had 100 couples in attendance.176 It is not known how long this club functioned, but references are found as late as November 1913.177

In 1939 a more ambitious approach was taken, when an all-University dance was attempted.

For the first time in the history of Creighton the School of Medicine will sponsor a dance. ... "We are going to make this dance another top-notcher on the bill-of-fare for Creighton University," stated Gilmore [William Gilmore, M.D. 1940]. "We want this dance to become a yearly affair. For a long time the school of medicine has never attempted to give a dance, and because we are breaking this practice, we shall need all the help we can get." 178

Perhaps they didn't get enough help, for there are no further references to this dance, annual or otherwise.
A Mission Unit was formed in 1932 at the School of Medicine complete with elected officers. Its purpose was to increase knowledge of the foreign Catholic missions and their needs, and to aid their cause through prayer and fundraising.

A Medical Debating Team was active in the early 1930’s, arguing against a team from the Law School. The debate topics include: “Is the average citizen qualified morally to become a lawyer or a doctor?” and, especially provocative, “Does medicine or law require the higher character?” According to The Creightonian in 1932, the debates were played out before capacity audiences in the University auditorium.

Beginning in 1985, the School of Medicine, along with St. Joseph Hospital, sponsored annual Make-A-Wish Runs, as fund raisers for the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Nebraska. This non-profit organization is dedicated to granting the wishes of terminally ill children. The runs require entry fees from participants, which are donated so that children with life-threatening diseases can achieve a dream come true. From a small start, entrants have increased to over 1,000 each year, making the run a major funding source for this organization.

Other organizations for medical students that are currently active on campus include the Christian Medical/Dental Society; the Simon L. Moskowitz Family Practice Club; the St. George Society, which is affiliated with the American Cancer Society and which, together with its University of Nebraska Medical Center counterpart, hosts an annual symposium on cancer; and the Military Medical Student Association. The latter was begun in 1989 by Steve Grosso (M.D. 1991) and is composed of about 45 medical students on scholarships from the Army, Navy and Air Force. Its purpose is to develop lines of communication within the military medical student community and to serve as a practical information source for military medical students in such matters as pay, benefits, residencies, paperwork, and other matters of concern to these students.

There are other formal and informal groups, past and present. Many medical specialty organizations seek student members and various ad hoc groups are formed to plan special events. It should continue thus for years to come.
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