

## **Physicians and publicity : a study / by E.S. McKee.**

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### **Publication/Creation**

[Cincinnati] : [publisher not identified], 1908.

### **Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ndur87ry>

### **Provider**

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## PHYSICIANS AND PUBLICITY: A STUDY.\*

BY E. S. MCKEE, M.D.,  
CINCINNATI.

*Doctors are the greatest deadbeat advertisers on earth.*

You are astonished? Astonished means struck dumb with amazement. You are not struck dumb, because you vigorously deny the assertion. Let us consider the truth of the proposition.

The author sometime since went to the postoffice to order a thousand stamped envelopes, and requested that the Postoffice department print his name and address in the upper left hand corner, which they do when printing the stamps on the envelopes, without extra charge. I wrote out the name and address, prefixing "Dr.," as that has belonged to me more than half my life, and seems to be a part of my name.

"Can't print that," said the man at the window, pointing to "Dr."

"Why not?" said I.

"We don't print any advertising," said he.

"Is that advertising?" said I.

"It has been so ruled by the Government," said he.

Come to think about it, it is about the biggest advertisement on earth. We are called "Doctor" here and "Doctor" there. It is "Good morning, Doctor," and "Good evening, Doctor," "Doctor, have this," and "Doctor, have that," "Is it going to rain, Doctor?" "What is good for a bad cold, Doctor?" We hear it everywhere—on the street, in the car, at the club, at church, sometimes till we almost forget our real names. This title is a constant, daily standing ad., and is a manner of advertising which is not carried on by any other profession. We do not hear constantly of Lawyer Lane, or Preacher Parsons, or Journalist Jones, or Teacher Thompson, or Carpenter Carey, Grocer Gray or Merchant Mathews. They employ other means of advertising which must be paid for. Many doctors belong to staffs of hospitals and to the faculties of medical colleges, to dispen-

saries, write frequently for the medical press and societies, and such merely for advertising purposes. Some treat hotel proprietors, boarding-house keepers and others who are in position to put money in their purses, without compensation or for advertising purposes. We carry little black, funeral-looking bags which tell to the public a square off that we are doctors of medicine.

Many people with a little experience can tell a doctor on first sight, or with a little conversation with him, without the aid of any of these advertisements, from some indescribable air. We have known doctors to go to the theatre, to church, to the club and even to the medical society, and have themselves called out, a pure fake, entirely for advertising purposes. Some doctors work their mouth as an advertising medium, talk "shop" all the time, on the street, in the car and at social gatherings; will relate what a great number of a certain kind of cases they have on hands, when the initiated can very readily refer to the reports of the health office and learn that there are not so many cases of this disease in the city for this man to have, to say nothing of the other thousand doctors. I have been told that a horse and buggy, and in some instances a closed carriage, is a paying investment as an advertisement. A doctor who had an automobile told me that it paid better to obtain certain results than any other investment. When we see a doctor cutting through the town in an auto at a break-neck speed, making everybody get out of his way with his "honk-honk" and his horrible smell, his outlandish dress, what more does it remind you of than a full-page ad. in the Sunday paper?

There are certain men high in the medical profession whom I have been led to honor all my medical life whose names and pictures and biographies, very carefully and correctly written, appear in every history of

\* Read before the Alumni Association, Medical College of Ohio, December 18, 1907.

Cincinnati, of Hamilton County, notable men of Cincinnati, eminent medical men, etc., etc. Of course, if it is proper for these men to do this it is proper for the young beginner to do the same, provided only he can raise the money.

#### NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING.

The first newspaper was started by a doctor. Appropriately he was a quack—that is, he was not recognized or allowed to practice by the Paris Faculty of Medicine. He was Theophraste Renaudot. He was a friend of Cardinal Richelieu, and through his influence became physician to King Louis XIII. Thus we see how early the clergy and kings came to the aid of quackery. It is even so unto this day. The Paris Faculty, which allowed no other physicians to practice in Paris except those promoted by itself, fought him from the start, but, Sweninger-like, he flourished in spite of them, because he had good backing. This newspaper, established in 1631, was called the *Gazette*, and is claimed to be continued to-day in the *Gazette de France*. The doctor found the news and gossip which he carried about with him on his visits to his patients so much more acceptable than his medicine that he started this newspaper, and found in it a very profitable advertising medium. He used his paper to push the sale of antimony, just as we have drug journals to-day. The use of antimony was at that time new in Paris, and the Paris Faculty fought it bitterly. This also advertised it. The richer Renaudot became the more charitable he pretended to be, and on each Saturday presented antimony free to the poor, apparently on purely philanthropic grounds. Out of this grew one of the earliest polyclinics, and proved a great advertisement for this skilled advertiser. After the death of Richelieu the Faculty succeeded in canceling his right to practice, and his end was in ignominy, as is true of many of his kind.

Certain physicians and surgeons in this and other cities, for some reason or other, find themselves very frequently appearing in the public press. They either do something or write something which gets them noticed by the daily paper. Sometimes this is due to acquaintance or friendliness among newspaper men. Other medical men, who do not often do things or say things which seem of interest to the daily press, appear seldom or never in the daily papers. Some of these latter, either through envy or through conscientious objection, criticise their confrères either openly or secretly. I recall some

twenty years or more ago a doctor who was then rising very rapidly to a leading position in the profession, which he has, fortunately, since attained. It seemed that every move that he made, everything that he essayed or accomplished in medicine or in society, was heralded in the public press. Especially was this so in regard to any successful treatment. The doctor would rave and declare that he had nothing to do with it, and that it chagrined him very much and harmed him greatly. He would beg and request the papers and reporters that nothing be said about him, but still it went merrily on. There were doctors—and an All-wise Providence has not stricken them down, Ananias-like, but still allows them to live—who said then and still maintain that the doctor who made such a row over the persistent advertising which he was getting, all the same not only winked at it, but also encouraged it, and even paid for it, the loud objection on his part being a prearranged part of the program. He fortunately does not need to resort to these methods any more, and I am glad to say does not.

Custom in certain cities permits of physicians, mostly specialists, publishing cards in the medical journals, stating that their practice is limited to certain lines, or that they pay special attention to this or that class of practice. Cincinnatians of the regular school have never done this. Hot Springs, Indianapolis, Kansas City and Los Angeles physicians publish such cards in their medical journals.

*Cui bono?* Does advertising pay? It only pays the man that spends the most money. This is so in business and in medicine, with the exception that in medicine advertising does positive harm with some people and in some instances. Permit me to cite a personal experience. The writer had two attacks of ivy poisoning. They were very severe and the treatment was rather unusual. From sad experience I was able to describe the case quite graphically, so much so that the article was quoted, in whole or in abstract, in over thirty medical journals. It was copied from the *Pacific Medical Journal* into the *Literary Digest*, and copied from that into the daily press all over the country, being published twice in Cincinnati daily papers. Although this was several years ago, and it was advertising which hundreds of dollars could not have bought for me, I have not noticed any increase in my number of cases of ivy poisoning. On the contrary, one of my suburban patients met me one day and said his son had contracted ivy poisoning,

but his wife had cut out my article from the *Times-Star* and they just sent over to the druggist for a saturated solution of sugar of lead in dilute alcohol and saved a doctor bill. Yet there are possibly doctors who thought I did this, or had it done, with a mercenary motive.

The president's address before the Illinois State Medical Society, by Dr. J. F. Percy, created a mild sensation by advocating that the medical profession advertise to the public just what it is doing to reduce the sum of human suffering. He said we must use the press to forward the true aims and objects of science. We must advertise the fact that we are giving more time and thought to destroy the need of our profession than any other. The irregulars use the press extensively, and they educate the public to the injury of all real scientific advance.

How can we best utilize newspaper space in such a way as to make it apparent to the public that we are ethical, honorable and virtuous and the other fellow corrupt, dishonest and irregular? The courts have construed that an advertisement is a "puff" or "boost" of the advertiser. The danger in advertising is that there will develop a rivalry between medical men as to space and position and frequency of advertising, which can be settled by the pocket-book alone, which is bad, to say the least. The most unscrupulous among medical men would be the ones who would profit most through advertising, being the most accomplished liars. It is the itching palm which reaches out to grasp the pen of publicity, not the benignant desire to spread broadcast the blessings of science or the cause of humanity. The instincts of commerce always have and always will chafe under the restrictions of ethics. Yet the medical profession and the lay press are sadly in need of each other's help.

Dog days having passed and the summer ended, we see a number of notices, varying from one or two to ten or twelve, which appear in the morning or evening papers, and announce in very legible type that Dr. So-and-So has returned, is at home. This is generally accompanied by his office address, and possibly his residence number, with sometimes his telephone number and office hours. This would have been improper twenty years ago. In one morning paper these ads. of at-home doctors always had at the top the ad. of M. D. Osgood, the chimney doctor—he of the transcontinental mustache. The chimney doctor had his ad. always at the top and had his picture in because he paid more than the other doctors.

One osteopath got in the list and one seamstress. These ads. appeared from one to ten times, a friendly rivalry seeming to exist between the professor of gynecology and the professor of obstetrics as to who could keep his standing the longer. It would seem better to herald the names of those doctors in the daily press who staid at home and attended to their patients through the heat and burden of the summer. What is proper in newspaper advertising in one locality is improper in another.

Politics seems to be receiving more attention of late at the hands of physicians, and this is as it should be. I do not, however, believe that I would choose as my medical attendant through a serious illness a medical man who was deeply involved in politics. I would feel that I was able to employ his undivided attention, yet the medical profession as a body should take a more prominent part in public life, both for its own good and for the good of the public. We have been too reticent for the good of all concerned. The public should be made to understand what is justice and what is injustice to the medical profession.

The *Leipziger Verband* is an organization to champion the material interests of physicians. This has changed mightily the standing of the medical profession in Germany. Formerly the German doctor was a backward, unobtrusive, half-starved individual, much of whose life was given up to a fruitless pursuit of some scientific fact and the rest to keeping body and soul together and keeping the general public from finding out how very poor he was. By means of the *Leipziger Verband* and its many branches throughout the Empire the physician kept up a certain amount of publicity, popular addresses, essays and a plan of education of the public. The medical profession must have its representatives in politics, in belles lettres, in art, in music, and in all that goes to make up what we term culture. Germany has seven physicians in the Reichstag and seven in the front rank of literature. In local political affairs the physicians of Germany, like their confrères in America, have never taken a leading part, the legal profession having there also a seeming inherited monopoly of all influential positions. A notable exception to the want of influence in political matters on the part of physicians in Germany was the instance of Virchow.

The power of the press is mighty. It exceeds that of the legislature. What we shall do with this great force, how we shall use it and not abuse it, is an important question.

It can undoubtedly be of great service to medicine, but not through abusing and villifying it nor by being too secretive concerning it with our deliberations and our discoveries. What the press wants, and must and will have, is the news, and the proper news from medicine should be properly supplied to it.

The Munich branch of the *Leipziger Verband* has a press committee which has done good service. They have not found it difficult to get on good terms with the lay press, but it is advisable to have a middleman, a medical man trained in journalism, best of all a medical adviser as collaborator on the influential dailies. In large papers the editorial department is entirely separate from the advertising, and the editors have been willing to publish articles calling attention to the fraudulent claims of nostrums. This has been most successfully done by the Carlsruhe Board of Health, an institution of non-medical origin. Medical sensations, new discoveries, should be carefully reported in the lay press, as they are generally garbled, misrepresented, and cause false hopes and disappointment, which result in increased mistrust of physicians. Progress in medicine should, according to this *Leipziger Verband*, be carefully written up for the public press, thereby enhancing the prestige of the profession, but new methods should not be heralded until they have been carefully proven. The writer of an article to popularize medicine should ponder well its various effects on the sick and on the well, and the possibility of misconceptions. Medical conventions should be written up for the lay press in a neat and attractive style by a medical man, not by a young reporter. This should be done with the view of imposing respect for medical research in general and for the laborious duties of the physician, thus serving both the cause of the profession and of science. Popular lectures to educate the public in medicine are good in their way, but the lecturer must be careful that he does not train up quacks by his labor. In the question of hygiene the voice of the physician should be always heard, even though unasked. In all matters affecting the public health they must give notice of their import-

ance with voice and pen and deed. How a young physician just starting is to let the world know that he is there is a question of moment, for he may starve if he waits for them to find it out. In the words of Virchow, he "should strive to steer his course with the utmost possible caution towards reachable goals."

I once met a medical man in a distant city who entertained me for an hour telling me what a wonderful business he was doing. In fact, I wondered how the rest of the doctors in that city and the surrounding States eked out an existence. Shortly afterward I was surprised to learn that the busy doctor's wife had sued him for divorce on the plea of non-support. She won her case, too, without any trouble. The doctor stood in with the press, and the newspaper accounts of the divorce suit were worked over into ads. by giving the doctor's prominence and specialty, his office residence and office hours, and the fact that, though he enjoyed a lucrative practice, he did not support his wife. The idea of using the divorce court for an advertising medium is unique, to say the least, and will serve to show what some members of the profession will resort to to gain an outlet for an inborn desire to advertise. This doctor was and still is an oral advertiser.

To repeat, the power of the press is a wonderful factor for good or for evil to the medical profession. We should use and not abuse this giant. It must and will have the news. It should have it properly supplied. If the medical profession would take to advertising, *en masse*, they would be no better off than now, but rather worse; the only advantage would be to the newspapers. One serious trouble with advertising is that it gives too much advantage to the man with the most money, as in the instance of my friend the chimney doctor, previously mentioned, and it frequently brings one into bad company.

Let me turn prophet. In twenty-five years doctors will advertise and pay for it just as other people, and the only ones who will benefit thereby will be the press. This is not a criticism of any one's actions, only a study of existing conditions.