

Some practical hints regarding medical post-graduate study in Berlin / by James N. Vander Veer.

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Publication/Creation

[New York] : [publisher not identified], 1906.

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Library of Congress
13821 62244693
March 23, 2015

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Reprinted from
Series, Vol. I, No. 4.

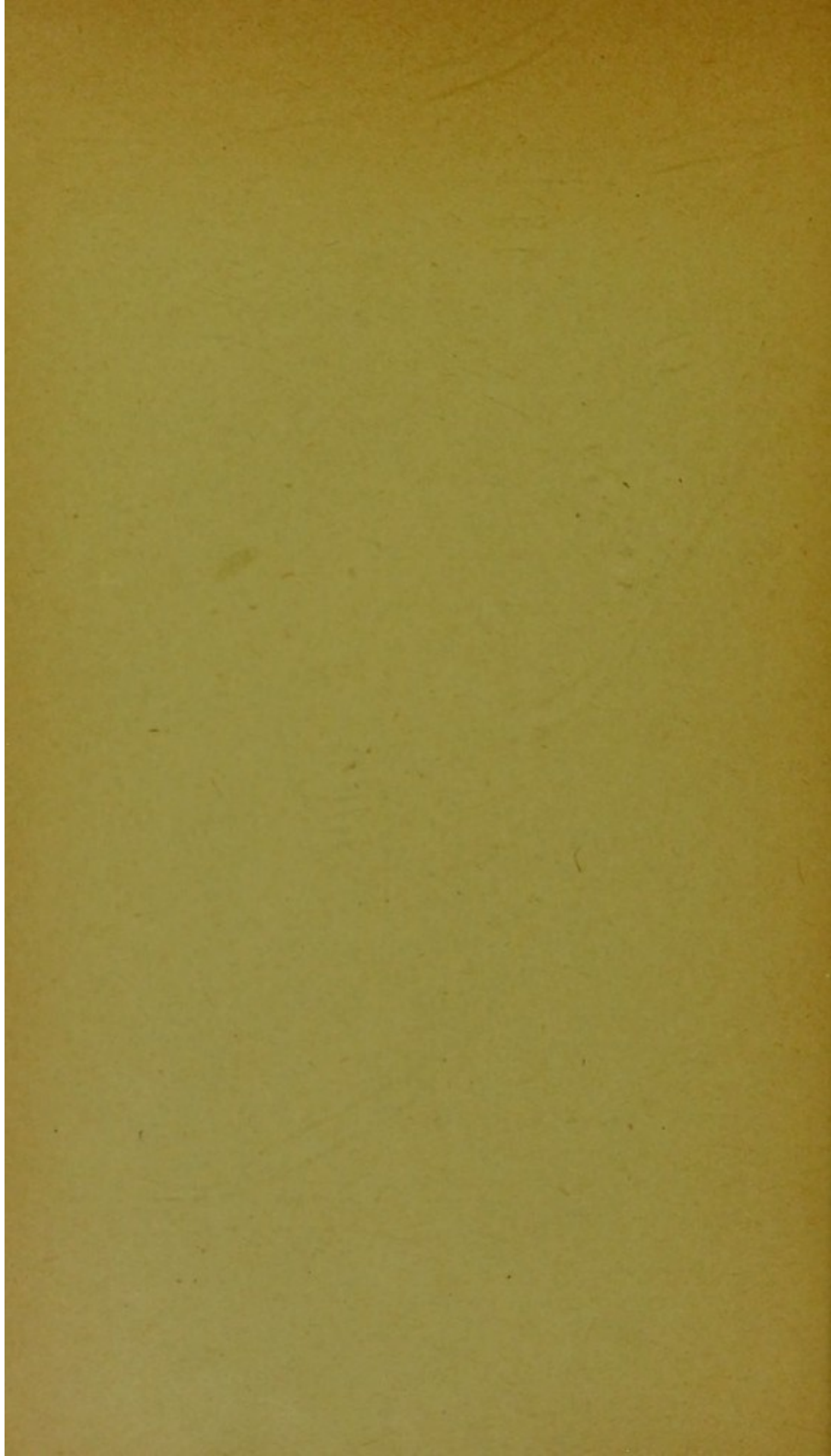
**SOME PRACTICAL
:: :: HINTS :: ::**

**REGARDING MEDICAL POST-
GRADUATE STUDY IN BERLIN**



**By JAMES N. VANDER VEER, M.D.,
of Albany, New York**

**Reprinted from AMERICAN MEDICINE, New
Series, Vol. I, No. 4, Pages 183-186, July, 1906**



[Reprinted from *American Medicine*, New Series, Vol. 1, No. 4,
pages 183-186, July, 1906.]

Some Practical Hints Regarding Medi- cal Postgraduate Study in Berlin.¹

BY

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To the Editor of American Medicine:—The majority of physicians in the United States, it is safe to presume, have peculiar ideas of postgraduate work as pursued in European cities; and it is for the benefit of those chiefly who have never been abroad but are looking forward to the time, not far distant perhaps, when they may have the good fortune to pursue such work, that I contribute these few hints concerning Berlin.

Most of us hear of but three large cities, Berlin, Vienna, and Paris, where such work is given on a large scale, but among the physicians who have studied abroad we occasionally meet one who has discovered some small city in which a special line of work is being carried out with the highest degree of efficiency and skill. However, we must acknowledge that it is in the larger continental cities that we find the greatest amount of material at the disposal of the profession, and hence the grouping of men interested in postgraduate work is always where the material is most plentiful, while the question of superiority of teaching in any given branch must necessarily be left to individual opinion.

¹These notes are gathered from a six weeks' trip through France, Switzerland and Germany, followed by a three months' residence in Berlin, in the summer and fall of 1904 and eight months' residence in 1905.

Of the three large cities mentioned, Berlin ranks second, at least in the scale of diverse material, as presented to the student by the many wellknown leaders in German work, and in the direct manner of presentation. With its 3,000,000 or more inhabitants (including therein the immediate adjacent towns) and its situation as capital of the German Empire it would be a tedious task to estimate the number of clinical patients treated annually within the portals of the numerous hospitals, clinics and polyclinics, as the methods of keeping track of the cases vary with each clinic. The cases presented to the students are mainly from the middle and poorer classes of people, but in some instances one comes in contact with the wealthy merchant class.

This material appears at the polyclinics, in general from four sources:

1. By reason of this or that particular polyclinic having the general care of the "Kranken-Kasse" (Sick Benefit Society) to which the patient belongs. In this way a large majority of patients receive treatment, as the poorer classes join these sick benefit societies in great numbers and pay but a small sum each week, receiving therefor free treatment, medicine and all medical and surgical appliances when needed without extra charge. Each polyclinic, save for those connected with a hospital or with the University or which partakes of a "semiprivate" character, is thus practically supported by a Kranken-Kasse, which contributes a stated sum for each patient and for each appearance of that patient in the polyclinic. In some polyclinics this stated sum is very small, 1 or 2 marks (25-50 cents) for the first appearance and examination of the patient, 10 to 50 pfennigs ($2\frac{1}{2}$ - $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents) for each subsequent treatment. In polyclinics of this character the services of the attending men are gratis, while each chief

accepts from 1-5 physicians each month as clinical assistants, receiving from \$10 to \$20 each month from each assistant in exchange for the instruction given in this special branch of work. But in a few of the polyclinics the receipts are large and partake of the nature of a semiprivate affair conducted by a regular organized body of physicians.

2. By reference of a patient to the special branches in each polyclinic from outside physicians. As a general rule physicians have but few nonpaying patients under their care, outside of the polyclinics. When a patient is unable to pay for medical attendance he is usually referred to a polyclinic for treatment.

3. By patients coming voluntarily to the polyclinic nearest their homes. One sees among this class of cases, patients able to pay a very nominal sum, but who have no regular physician, and who seek a particular polyclinic in order to obtain the services of men of whom they have heard.

4. By patients who have received benefit from some specialist in the polyclinic and who refer their friends for all manner of ailments to that specialist. By a second reference the patient comes into the hands of the proper physician in that polyclinic and receives treatment. This class includes in the main the poor and ignorant, though one occasionally sees a semiprivate patient among the number.

The university also has a series of clinics in every branch of medicine. These clinics are supported by the government and by the semiprivate patients, resembling in the main our own city hospitals and dispensaries.

In a rough estimate of the various polyclinics made from the enumerations given in the various publications there are no less than 25 recorded, not including the private ones, while the divisions of each polyclinic, and the various

clinics for special branches are numbered in the hundreds.

At one of the polyclinics which it was my good fortune to have stumbled upon when following out the subject of surgical diseases of the bladder, etc., I was privileged to see and examine 53 patients treated in two hours by the chief of the clinic and his 5 assistants. On this day there were no less than 10 cystoscopies or ureteral catheterizations done, to say nothing of a multitude of endoscopies; but this attendance was a record breaker, as the usual number averaged but 25-30 cases a day (including 5-10 new ones), the remainder being mostly chronic conditions.

A second clinic on surgery, conducted four times a week, yielded no less than four operations in the two hours of each session, most of these operations being of the major class.

In this way one can gather but a general idea of the amount of material disposed of throughout the various clinics and polyclinics in the city, but one can readily appreciate that it is enormous and that the facilities for studying cases in many of the specialties are of the best.

Before entering satisfactorily on a course of postgraduate work in Berlin it is naturally a prerequisite that the student have at least a speaking knowledge of the German language, the more fluent one is, the better are the results obtained. While a number of the clinic chiefs and regular assistants speak the English language to a very limited extent, and understand it much better, it is not for a moment to be expected that a practitioner can derive much, if any benefit when only English and the usual Latinish medical terms are to be depended upon for means of communication. It is also to be recommended that the practitioner become familiar with the old German script if he wishes to peruse the clinical records, for but few of the

records are written in the so-called new, or Latinish script.

With such opportunities of study at hand, it is but natural to ask the question as to who gives the best courses in the various branches. For one to depend upon the courses as taken by some friend years ago is but a poor way to grope around, as conditions, in the matter of the teaching ability of one man and his assistants, the present amount of material at their disposal, and the manner of presenting the same are constantly changing.

Again to depend upon the books which are purchased giving outlines of the various courses, is very unsatisfactory by reason of the multitude of polyclinics; and for one to attempt attendance on the various clinics in a given subject before enrolling, is wellnigh impossible without a perfect knowledge of the language, the city and the characteristics of each chief and clinic, to say nothing of the loss of time.

It must be surmised, therefore, that a ready means of communication has been discovered whereby one can quickly grasp the possibilities of each clinic and the various means of instruction. This can be done, however, in numerous ways after the prospective student has fixed firmly in his mind just exactly what lines of study are to be followed. And here it is of the utmost importance to remember that "specialty in everything" is pushed to extremes on the continent and it is better to select some few special subjects in the several branches of medicine desired, as "special pathology of carcinoma"; "the eye"; "the ear", etc., rather than to plan an outline of several kinds of work as in "surgery of the abdomen" (for this is already divided into branches) or in "general medicine," save as one wishes simply to see an innumerable number of cases presented clinically without time for examining closely a single case.

Information can be had of the various clinics by:—1. Presenting one's card at the clinic with an accompanying card from an American physician who is personally known by the chief or one of the assistants. This invariably presages a cordial welcome for a short stay. 2. Having one of the students of a clinic give a personal introduction to the chief. This also assures access to the clinic usually for a lengthened stay or repeated visits over a long period. 3. Visiting at the clinic desired. In most cases entrance is easily obtained by presentation of one's personal card, when the chief is usually glad to grant the privilege of a visit for a few days. This manner, however, is rather frowned upon by the majority of clinic chiefs as several have been imposed upon by simple medical students sojourning in Berlin and in rare cases by men who were not physicians at all.

In this connection it is not amiss to speak of the Anglo-American Medical Association of Berlin, which has filled a long desired want in the professional work of English-speaking physicians when visiting or studying in Berlin. This organization, exceedingly variable in the number of its active members, meets each Saturday evening at 7:45 in a special room of the Heidelberger Restaurant of the Central Hotel. Its members gather at this hour, partake of an evening meal according to their individual fancies, and discuss the work pursued by each individual, the character of each clinic and their various methods of presenting cases; and thus impart valuable information, especially of new courses about to be given which can readily be appreciated by any newcomers who have not as yet started to work.

Following this social part a lecture is given in German by one or another of the wellknown medical professors or assistant professors of the University on some special topic, usually arranged

for and announced in the week previous. Hence, in these various ways interest kept alive among the students and aid given to the newcomers. They also maintain a reading room with the latest journals. The president now holds office permanently and is Dr. J. H. Honan of 78 Lutzowstrasse and all communications are sent to him.

A second feature is also to be noted. In the fall of 1904 the Nu Sigma Nu Fraternity, well known in the United States through its chapters in various medical colleges, established headquarters in the Alexandra Hotel on Mittelstrasse 16 and 17, hoping thereby to form a nucleus of English-speaking physicians whereby information could be imparted concerning the courses and other matters of interest to newcomers.

By both these means a newcomer can come into direct touch with men who will gladly put him on the right track and save much vexation and worry, to say nothing of lost time.

It is a matter of prime importance to the student to choose his work insofar as is practicable in polyclinics near to each other and not far distant from his room, so that there is wasted only the minimum of time in walking from one clinic to another. And as there are peculiar laws and regulations regarding the changing of one's room it is best to select a permanent location in the quarter nearest one's work. While the polyclinics and clinics are widely scattered throughout this large city, yet most of the work is done in a space whose limits are bounded by a 20-minute walk from the center of the city, namely from Unter den Linden. And owing to the numerous restaurants scattered throughout this, the business center of the city, the matter of food is easily solved.

In a paper of this length it would be amiss to omit some of the various courses given and

it might be well to enumerate the manner of their presentation. Hence the following will be found of aid:—

(1) *The University Courses.* The “Friedrich-Universität zu Berlin” is located on Unter den Linden some three blocks east of Friedrichstrasse. The attendance during the winter semester, October to April, is in the neighborhood of 7,000 actually enrolled students alone, while some 6,000 attend as “hearers”. The summer semester is from the middle of April to October. Matriculation costs \$5 and is to be accompanied by diploma from a medical school and by a passport of the United States for those physicians who wish to avail themselves of the University courses. Students are referred to the volumes headed “Das Medizinische Berlin” (published by S. Karger, Karlstrasse 15, and costing about 20 cents) for further information regarding the rules and regulations; and to the “Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen” (published by Oscar Rothacker, Friedrichstrasse 105 B, and costing about 15 cents) for a list of the courses.

In this connection might be mentioned the fact that the expense of each course is very low and that the majority of the work is in the various and larger clinics.

(2) *The Ferien Courses for Physicians.* These are two sets of lectures given in the vacation periods of spring and fall of each year, usually the last of April and of September, by members of the “Dozentenvereins für Ferienkurse,” (Society of Privatdocents) who are in the main, the assistants at the various clinics and polyclinics.

The lectures and practical sessions are given for a period of 4 weeks at stated hours each day and one can select a course on almost any subject and under a variety of teachers of repute. Of necessity the lectures are on somewhat advanced work and contain usually only the cream

of the subjects under consideration. It is an excellent way to learn the newest and most practical advances in the various branches of medicine and to brush up on any particular subject.

The expense of each course varies with the teacher, but in the main the cost is from \$10—\$25 for 24 or more actual hours of work. Information concerning these courses is readily obtainable by visiting or addressing the secretary Herr Melzer, who dwells in the Langenbeck Haus, Ziegelstrasse 10. Registration for these courses is through the secretary and is best performed at the earliest opportunity as some courses are limited in the number of students.

(3) *The Monthly Courses.* These are abundant, many of the polyclinics being devoted to this sort of work alone. Each course lasts a full month, the members are usually limited in number to two or four. Registration is with the clinic chief direct and is best performed early owing to the limited number allowed in the clinic. The majority of the clinic chiefs are connected with the University, but occasionally one finds a polyclinic run entirely by men not so connected and yet anxious to come in contact with the practising physicians of other countries, and provided with an abundance of material. The prices are about the same as in No. 2.

Reference is made to these courses in the first book under heading number one.

(4) *Special Courses.* These can be obtained in almost any subject and at any time from a number of men, but usually the better teachers prefer students to search out and take the regular courses. Students combine into a group of from 2-6 and go to the man selected and arrange the hours. There is a fixed price for each course and it matters not whether one, two or more take the course save there is always a maximum limit. The cost of the course is then

divided between the students. The hardest courses to get, sometimes many week's waiting being necessary, are in general surgery, because of the specialism which prevails.

From these few hints it will be noted that one can obtain work on almost any subject in the months September to May inclusive; that it is best to arrive in Berlin during the early fall and survey the ground for a week or so before making any definite plans; to bear in mind that the courses are not given in a large hospital or medical college but rather in smaller polyclinics covering a large area of a large city; and finally that the work is clinical and not didactic.

