

An address to the members of the Royal College of Surgeons, on the regulation of the surgical department of the Royal Infirmary / [Andrew Wardrop].

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Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

Publication/Creation

Edinburgh : D. Schaw, 1800.

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AN
A D D R E S S
TO
THE MEMBERS
OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS,
*On the REGULATION of the SURGICAL DEPARTMENT
of the ROYAL INFIRMARY.*

By ANDREW WARDROP.

Edinburgh:
PRINTED BY D. SCHAW AND CO. RIDDELL'S CLOSE.
1800.

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TO

THE MEMBERS

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T O
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OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

THE Memorial which has recently been presented by Dr Gregory to the Managers of the Royal Infirmary, on the manner in which the attendance of the Surgeons, is, and ought to be regulated ; has not only brought the subject, anew, under the consideration of those immediately concerned, but has also warmly interested the Public mind.

The Managers, convinced as they are, that some change ought to be adopted, but determined to proceed with that caution which the importance of the case requires, have desired to be informed of the opinion of the College of Surgeons, in their collective capacity, before they shall decide in favour of any specific change. The College, in order to be enabled properly to fulfil the desire of the

Managers, has invited each of its Members to transmit to the President his sentiments in writing. As, at our public meetings, we have not leisure to engage in long discussions, this seems to be the best method that can be devised for obtaining the genuine sense of the whole College, on a subject of the most serious importance; and it becomes the duty of every Member who has maturely considered it, to communicate his sentiments, in this channel, to the rest of his Brethren.

It is for this reason I submit to their consideration the present Address; assuring them, that I am more solicitous to develop the principles which ought to guide the College in returning an answer to the Managers, than to have my own plan preferred.

My opinion on this subject has been long decided. I have indeed uniformly deemed the present arrangements of the Surgical Department of the Infirmary as very faulty, much worse indeed than those which existed during the first years of my attendance as a surgeon of the Hospital. The four surgeons, who, under the name of *Substitutes*, then acted as assistants to the monthly attendants, and who, occasionally, had the sole charge of the house, formed a body of men, whose duty it was to see the regulations enforced, and who were accustomed to deliberate and act in concert. I remember a particular period at which this office was filled by individuals, who, matured by experience, though still in the vigour of life, attended the Hospital with assiduity, neglected no part of its business, and added many improvements to the art of surgery. These advantages are to be ascribed, in part, to that spirit of emulation, which naturally arises among men of ability engaged in the same pursuit. The succession of Substitutes, however, by *Rotation*, as well as of the monthly attendants, rendered the system defective; and would have rendered it more and more defective, had it continued to the present time,

time, in proportion to the increasing number of the Members of the College of Surgeons. But I must confess, that the plan which was substituted, and which is at present acted upon, appeared to me, from the beginning, and still appears, far more objectionable than that which it supplanted : Because, by the present regulations, the business of the Surgical Department fluctuates incessantly from one to another, and the benefits arising from friendly discussion, and from due experience, are excluded ; or, to sum up all, because, neither are adequate motives nor opportunities for useful exertion provided. So that the new arrangement retained much that was faulty, and excluded every thing that was beneficial, in the old. At that time I thought of another plan, which, I supposed, might remove the defects of the old arrangement, and prevent others which were apprehended from the new ; and which, in particular, might tend to keep alive amongst the Surgeons a spirit of emulation, useful to the charity, and advantageous to the profession.

The renewed discussion of this subject, occasioned by Dr Gregory's Memorial, induced me immediately to submit my opinion, confirmed by experience, to the consideration of some of those who are interested in the point at issue. Several incidental circumstances have, hitherto, prevented me from laying it before all the Members of the College of Surgeons. I hope that it is not yet too late. This delay, by enabling me to ascertain, in some degree, the opinions of others, qualifies me to make a few observations on them : After which, I shall state my plan without alteration, as I think it better to present it in its original form, than incumbered with those minute modifications, which the ideas of others have suggested.

As it is fully as material to ascertain the points on which men agree, as those on which they *differ*, I begin by remarking, that the whole

whole of the Members of the College of Surgeons seem to be unanimous on two material articles. *First*, That the removal of the sufferings of the unfortunate class of patients to whom the Infirmary offers an asylum, is the leading object of the institution, and ought upon no account to be sacrificed to any other consideration. *Secondly*, That the means of instruction which this institution affords to medical students, and of practical improvement to professional men, is the object next in importance. To attain the first of these objects then, at all events, and to secure the second, as subservient to it, ought to be the steady aim of every one of us. If we adhere closely to these general principles, it is not likely that we shall differ widely in their application.

With respect to the *Detail*, too, it seems to be admitted by every individual, that there are faults attending the present regulation of the Surgical Department, which may and ought to be corrected. This is an important coincidence of opinion, which should not for a moment be forgotten. I shall now proceed to the points on which there exists a diversity of sentiment.

There are three opinions which have their respective supporters among the Members of our College.

I. The first is that of those, who, admitting in common with all their Brethren, the existence of material defects in the present system, maintain, nevertheless, that these may be lessened, or removed, without giving up the plan of attendance by Rotation; who consider the right of attendance by rotation to belong to them; and who insist upon defending this supposed right at all hazards.

This opinion is, I believe, supported by a majority of the Members of the College of Surgeons. Its adherents propose, indeed, some modifications,

modifications, and particularly an extension of the term of attendance by rotation, but none of them propose to extend it beyond the term of one year.

The evils *necessarily* resulting from a system of attendance by rotation, have been so amply and variously exhibited by Dr Gregory, and others, that I could only repeat their arguments, by renewing the discussion. The reasonings of these gentlemen has forcibly impressed the minds of the Managers; and they appear to a considerable number of our own body, of whom, I am one, so convincing, that I think I may assume, as a principle, that the system of rotation, under any modification, can never fulfil the purposes of the institution: and till their arguments are confuted, the humanity and regard for consistency of those who profess the opinion opposite to this, should alike induce them to abandon it. Nay, if they consult their own interest only, they will agree to this measure; for, while rotation is carried through such a numerous body, on the present plan, there is no time for improvement; and should it be extended to the longest period proposed, it would still be very inadequate for this purpose. For each individual could have so limited a charge of the Hospital, during the whole course of his life, that he could neither gain experience, nor acquire reputation, by his greatest exertions. Besides, it has been well remarked, that the Managers have it in their power to counteract the designs of those who contend for this system, by extending the term of each individual's attendance, to such a length, as to confine the charge of the Hospital to a very limited number.

If these propositions cannot be set aside, the adherents of the first opinion tacitly admit, that their professions of regard to the Hospital, and even to the improvement of surgery, are mere words of course, which yield to the spirit of party, or individual selfishness.

The public are convinced of the necessity of a change of system, and will not easily be made to believe, that the present is the best. Would the Surgeons plead their right in a court of law, in defiance of the dictates of humanity?

II. The second opinion is, that the College ought to give up into the hands of the Managers, every claim as to the mode of attendance, and to recommend to them the Election of a few surgeons for life, or for such a series of years, as to be equal to the usual duration of professional activity.

Those who hold this opinion, think it but fair, that the Managers ought to return the sum which they received from the College, sixty years ago, as purchase money for attendance by rotation. They further think, that if the College refuse to accede to these terms, the Managers should have recourse to a legal process, or an application to the British Parliament. This opinion stands in direct opposition to the former, and, I own, by no means coincides with my ideas on the subject. The measures which it recommends are of such a nature, as to provoke the determined opposition of a great majority of the College of Surgeons, and should they have recourse to a court of law, the expenditure of the funds appropriated for the comfort of the poor, would be regarded by the Public with marked disapprobation, if, by any reasonable concession on the part of the Managers, it could be avoided. Or even supposing, that the Surgeons should not carry their opposition so far, yet they would be disposed ever afterwards to view the Infirmary with an unfriendly eye; a circumstance, which would be productive of evils worse than those which it is the professed object of all of us to remove. This is an important reason why a middle plan, steering clear of either of the two extremes I have stated, ought to be adopted.

But,

But, independent even of this consideration, I am decidedly of opinion, that such permanent appointments are, upon the whole, unfavourable to the welfare of the Hospital, and of the public good, as it is connected with the improvement of surgery.

In this I differ from a friend of whom I think so highly, that when we have occasionally disagreed on any topic, I have always been more inclined to suspect the fallacy of my own judgment, than of his. He thinks the permanent appointment of surgeons would lead to a much higher improvement of the art, than any other mode that can be devised. My idea is, that if an arrangement were formed, by which the Managers might, under certain limitations, elect a given number, in the vigour of life, for a considerable period, which number should be gradually succeeded by others, that the evils of rotation, on the one hand, and those of permanent appointments, on the other, might be alike prevented. This opinion seems to be more warranted by our knowledge of human nature, than that to which it is opposed. For an honourable desire to excel each other, and not to appear inferior to their successors, will excite in the minds of the surgeons thus appointed, a zealous attention to the duties of their office, from which the highest advantages may be derived; while the extension of the term of appointment, and the proposed order of election, will insure a regular and gradual supply of competent surgeons.

It has been asserted, that a very few surgeons bred in the Hospital, are sufficient to perform all the business in this city, which is purely surgical. I admit, that a very small number, perhaps one or two, may perform all the capital operations: but even in capital operations, it were not to be wished, that the choice of the public should be confined to so small a compass, or rather that the public should have no choice at all. Besides, surgery takes in a
much

much wider field than so small a number could decently manage. So that, were the Managers, by the permanent appointment of so limited a number, even of men of talents, to bring them thus into a kind of monopoly of private practice, it ought to be matter of regret, not of satisfaction, to the public. But the Managers, with the most upright intention, have not the power of divination, and might sometimes be mistaken in their choice: or, if they should elect the ablest men, how could they provide against those casualties incident to human life, by which, on such a plan, we might suddenly be left destitute of proper surgical aid.

I am well aware, however, of the danger to be apprehended in trusting to speculative reasonings, in adopting any important change. I shall therefore willingly submit the question to the test of experience; and the facts, which I shall for this purpose adduce, are of such a nature, that those to whom they are addressed, are quite competent to estimate their reality and their force.

First, During the time when the substitute surgeons existed, and when they happened to have the sole charge of the Infirmary, its business was much better conducted than it is at present, and many important improvements were made in surgery.

Secondly, Among the numerous hospitals in England, excepting those of the metropolis, we meet with surprisingly few improvements; so few indeed, and insignificant, that if we except those introduced by one gentleman at Liverpool, they are not worthy of being named.

Thirdly, Although in London a spirit of emulation is promoted, by the number of hospitals which it contains; yet even these are not so well attended as the Infirmary is at present. Most of them
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are visited once or twice a week only. All intervening cases are left to the care of a house-furgeon, and those surgeons who have attained eminence, attend only on particular occasions.

These facts, if admitted, form a most substantial argument in favour of the third opinion as to the mode of attendance; which, as it has been in some measure anticipated, and will be more fully developed in the sequel, I shall here state concisely, and without any comment.

III. The supporters of this opinion maintain, that the present mode of indiscriminate and rapid *Rotation*, ought henceforth to give place to *Election* by the Managers: That the number of those elected ought to be considerable; but that the interests of the institution, and of the public, do not require, nay, that they oppose permanent appointments: That, therefore, such limitations and rules should be adopted, as to insure a gradual and regular supply to the different offices of the Surgical Department; as also to afford a probability to a majority of the College of Surgeons, of their being at one period or another elected: And, *lastly*, that to supersede every question about the matter of right, and avoid an odious litigation, the repayment of the sum paid long ago by the Surgeons ought to be dispensed with, on the adoption of some such plan as this.

In conformity to these general principles, I shall subjoin four specific propositions, on which I believe we are also agreed, and which I think should form the basis of the answer to be returned by the College to the Managers, and of any new arrangement which the Managers may adopt.

1. That the right to *elect* surgeons to the Royal Infirmary, shall be vested solely in the Managers.

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2. That

2. That not less than four surgeons shall be elected to the principal charge of the Infirmary.

3. That one of these shall be changed at the end of every year, or of every two years at farthest.

4. That no surgeon shall be appointed one of those, to whom the principal charge of the Infirmary is committed, until he shall have served four years as an assistant.

*A PLAN for the Future Regulation of the SURGICAL
DEPARTMENT of the ROYAL INFIRMARY.*

I PROPOSE that the Surgeons to be appointed be divided into three classes. 1st, CONSULTING SURGEONS—2^d, ATTENDING SURGEONS—and, 3^d, ASSISTING SURGEONS.

I. OF THE CONSULTING SURGEONS.

THE Managers may elect for life, or while they continue to do their duty, six or eight consulting surgeons: the precise number is not material. Their places may afterwards be supplied by the attending surgeons, who shall have finished their duty; for I propose, that to the list of consulting surgeons, shall be added every attending surgeon at the termination of his appointment. Such only of these gentlemen should attend consultations, as may be called upon by the surgeons in attendance; but they should promise to obey their summons; and if it appear that they neglect their duty, while they continue fit for it, their names should be struck out of the list.

II. OF THE ATTENDING SURGEONS.

I PROPOSE that six surgeons be elected, who shall have the charge of the Surgical Department of the Hospital, for the term of six

fix years, according to a method which I am soon to state. Two of these shall attend at one time, and for three months: then two others shall succeed them for the same period; lastly, the remaining two shall take charge of the Hospital. Thus each of these six surgeons will have the charge of the house for three months out of nine, during the whole period of six years. The seniority among those first elected, shall be determined by lot, and ever afterwards by priority of election. At the end of the first year, the senior attending surgeon shall go out of office, and the senior assistant surgeon be appointed in his place; and thus, at the end of each succeeding year, the senior attendant shall retire, and his place be supplied, as above specified, by the senior assistant. I would propose, however, an exception, viz. that after the lapse of three years from the period at which any attendant surgeon retires from office, the Managers should reserve to themselves the power of re-electing him for one other period, but not oftener; and in this case, the senior assistant surgeon will of course not be appointed. As a vacancy may occur by death or resignation, in the intervals between the stated periods of election, I beg leave to suggest, as an easy expedient for avoiding any inconveniency which may thus arise, that the Managers shall appoint the senior assistant in his place; that the person so appointed shall go out at the time, when his predecessor, had he continued in office, would have retired; and finally, that such casual elections shall not in the least interfere with the right of the person then appointed to be twice elected in the ordinary course; or in place of bringing in the senior assistant, on such a vacancy, it should be in the option of the Managers to re-elect one of those surgeons who may have already served for one or even two periods, and thus to retain, for some time longer, any man whose activity and abilities may deserve such a compliment.

The two surgeons in attendance may divide the business of the
house

house betwixt them, in the manner now followed by the physicians, but this, and many regulations of subordinate arrangement, may be left to the judgement of the attending surgeons.

I do not think it one of the least advantages of this plan, that it provides six gentlemen, who will often frequent the Hospital, and will naturally take care of its interests, and see that its regulations be enforced. It should indeed be their duty to meet together, at certain stated times, to consider the management of the wards under their care, and to represent to the Managers whatever they may think conducive to the welfare of the patients *.

It has been proposed to fix a salary in future on the surgeons of the Hospital, though it is admitted that the funds of the Hospital cannot afford this expenditure. There is indeed one way in which a remuneration might be bestowed without any deduction from the funds. I am persuaded, that when the new arrangement takes place, the surgeons will bestow infinitely greater pains, than they do at present, in teaching the dressers the skilful performance of their duty. There will, consequently, arise a much greater competition, than now exists, for this office ; and though the students do not seem now willing to incur any expence in obtaining it, yet the increased benefit they will then receive, will readily induce many of them, to give a handsome fee for the appointment. This fee, as

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* In the absence of one of the attending surgeons, another *Attending* surgeon, and not the *Assistant*, should perform his duty. These two classes should, I am of opinion, be kept perfectly distinct ; for, if a discretionary power be committed to the chief surgeons, to devolve their duty upon an assistant, there is no end of the abuses which may follow. Whereas, if they are confined in their choice of occasional substitutes to those of equal rank with themselves, they will not incline to apply for their aid, except in cases of necessity. It is the part of Mr Thomson's plan that respects this subject, to which I chiefly object, although I perfectly agree with his general principles, and think highly of particular parts of his specific proposals.

in London, may be given to the surgeons in attendance, as a compensation for their trouble. A reciprocal obligation will thus be created, on the surgeons to bestow sufficient pains in instructing the dressers, and on these to receive their instructions with attention.

III. OF THE ASSISTANT SURGEONS.

I PROPOSE, that, from among those who shall have been not less than four years Members of the College of Surgeons, three assistant surgeons be elected, who shall attend the Infirmary, one by one, in regular succession, for the space of three months; and who shall continue in office till they are regularly promoted, in the manner above specified, to the office of attending surgeons. Every vacancy thus occurring among the assistants shall be supplied by a new election.

Their province shall be to assist at operations, to perform dissections, and to arrange the business of the waiting-room, under the direction of the attending surgeon. Frequent dissection is the best school at which an operator can be formed: the utility of devolving this trouble upon the assistant surgeon, must therefore be obvious.

It is matter of serious regret, under the present system, that scarcely any time is allotted for giving advice to the numerous applicants who resort occasionally to the Hospital, and who either do not wish for admission, or whose complaints are of such a nature, as to preclude their reception into the house. When we consider the fatal consequence that may arise from the neglect of complaints at first trivial, and the great benefit which the persons afflicted may derive, by being put upon a proper method of managing their disorders, it will unquestionably be admitted, that this ought
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to be an *essential* part of the business of the house, and that the superficial manner in which it is at present conducted, is an evil which calls for an effectual remedy.

I propose, for this purpose, that the acting assistant surgeon shall examine minutely all such cases, while the attending surgeons are visiting the regular patients, and that the assistant shall afterwards concert with them the directions which ought to be given. I am also decidedly of opinion, that these directions shall henceforward be given, not verbally, but as distinctly as possible *in writing*. Were some such plan established, many of those, who by the little satisfaction they now obtain, are prevented from applying for advice, might be encouraged to seek, and might happily find relief, from complaints, which, if neglected, may lay the foundation of the worst diseases.

I have now detailed the plan I have to offer at sufficient length. Should it, or any similar plan, be adopted, no surgeon will have the charge of the Hospital till he is sufficiently qualified for the task; and every active surgeon will be retained as long as other avocations leave him leisure or inclination to do his duty. At the same time, in the course of years, a great proportion of the Members of the College, will be elected to this charge.

In the event of the adoption of this plan, every young practitioner of abilities, and eager to attain eminence in his profession, may much sooner be brought forward into a situation in which he may make himself distinguished, than by any mode of rotation including all the Members of the College.

From these observations, I think it will clearly appear to every man of candour, that the Members of the College of Surgeons, by
acquiescing

acquiescing in this, or a similar plan, will, instead of giving up what they may deem their lawful privileges, establish them on a more solid and permanent basis, while they will have the satisfaction of conferring on the Hospital the most essential benefits.

Printed by D. Schwarz and Co. Riddell's Close.