Presidential Address
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President of the Endocrine Society, 1970–1971

THIS morning I shall discuss some problems of the Presidency. I choose to do this here:

1. Because your increasing interest in the management of the Society deserves that I tell you what I learned this year and thus share the Presidency with you or, at least, share its problems with you.
2. Because I would like openness and frankness to be our ambience.
3. Because purposefully, as counterpoint, I wish to keep your minds unencumbered—in contemporary language, to keep you loose—so that you can enjoy the beautiful biochemical endocrinology which follows immediately in the Eli Lilly Lecture. I shall have another, briefer, opportunity to make some more properly Presidential remarks.

My difficulties with the Presidency began a year ago when a young friend, in congratulating me, said, “I hope you will do something with the Society and not be just another President.” These words haunted me during the succeeding summer months. Later in the Fall, on seeing him again, I reported that I had studied the situation earnestly and had come to the conclusion that it was hopeless: there was so much conservatism and inertia that no President, however eager, could budge it and that I herewith washed my hands of the matter. Obviously this emotional purge made me feel much better. However, lest one lose perspective, inertia has virtue in that it allows constancy of form and substance. Were it not so, the Society would be fragile, buffeted from year to year by one or another group and hence unstable. Besides, the inertia is not total—new activities have been introduced, albeit slowly, and the Society has tried to march to the beat of current events. Like hormones, management can induce and regulate activity. Also, it appeared to me that lack of rapid progressiveness was due to some deficiency in the management structure. “Specificity” is a term Endocrinologists understand well, and one specific remedy shall be suggested later.

I have one more brick to put in place. From time to time, groups have been exhorted by the same slogan stated in different words. One of these comes to mind—“Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country.” I shall ask you the reverse—What indeed is the Society doing for you? If it has done something, then I ask “Yes, but what has it done for you lately?”

The Society has done the same things for the past 40 years. It has an Annual Meeting, publishes two journals, conducts a Postgraduate Assembly, and issues honors and awards.

Annual Meeting

Its purpose is to allow each of us to present papers, to listen, and to visit with friends. Is it too short? Should every member have the privilege of presenting one paper? Why are our clinician members perennially complaining of paucity of clinical papers? Every management has worried over these and other questions; each time, the established criteria for selection are adhered to—presentation of new knowledge, whether this comes from a complex chemical study or from one third of a case report. But is the annual meeting enough? Should we not, years ago, have established regional meetings in addition to meet the needs of a growing membership and of special interest groups? Should we not do this now and have such Endocrine groups as part of the National Society? Now we regard such groups as competing. Shall we

567
watch impotently the relentless fragmentation of our Society?

Journals

The two high quality journals of the Society are a tribute to the principles and caliber of our Society. But do they meet the Society's present need? Again, other endocrinology journals have sprouted; the endocrine literature, already hopeless, is scattered throughout the journals of the world. Would our professional lives be easier if some consolidation were effected; or are the half dozen or more major abstracting journals adequate? What about current reviews in *Endocrinology*—our members write these for other journals but not for our own. Monographs, Workshops, and Special Conferences, handled by other journals as supplements, are apparently not in our sphere. It is said that expansion of our publication function is too costly and therefore not financially feasible. It is true that publication is very costly; it is not true that an adequate financial base could not be worked out if a totally new, different publication policy were effected—after all, the publication industry is profitable.

Teaching

The Postgraduate Assembly meets a great need of our clinical members. If necessary, it can be held more often. A new undertaking for laboratory and other nonclinical members was introduced this year by the Postgraduate Committee. The Workshop on Radioimmunoassay Methodology is a prototype of what many would have liked for many years. Similar undertakings devoted to other types of methodology are needed and I hope the Society will quickly fulfill such needs whenever they arise.

Management

We have been told on occasion that the Endocrine Society is the most undemocratic Society extant, that the same people appear on all the committees, that it is an old man's Club, that the Eastern Seaboard Establishment runs it, that our women members are neglected, etc. Possibly a few resignations have resulted.

As you know, the management of the Society is vested in its Council. The incoming President suggests Committee members when vacancies occur, but only the Council makes the selection. You are all familiar with the recent modification of the bylaws which places on the ballots candidates elected by the membership for positions on the Council and Nominating Committee. Blank spaces have always been included for each position on the ballot. All these steps were taken to ensure democratization of the Society, a wish that is being more forcibly expressed. I would defend democracy to the last for our political life; but, in the general scheme of things, I do not get too excited about squeezing every drop of it into the affairs of a very small professional society whose goals are extremely limited. Pushed to its ultimate, democracy cannot function efficiently for the Society any more than it could for an Army battalion or a troop of Boy Scouts. Consider the result when an order to advance or retreat, to camp or to sing, or to organize a pick-up detail is to be determined by appropriate hearings, debate, caucus, and vote. I am not sure that the new bylaws necessarily result in more democracy. The amendments place a name on the ballot if 10 votes come from the membership. If spontaneous, this is fine. However, everyone has at least 10 friends who can be persuaded; and if one does not have 10 friends, then he should immediately form a lobby to protect his minority rights. The authors of the amendments did not quite have in mind the use of the amendment for a private claque. Incidentally, the same undemocratic pathway, the "claque shunt," exists for the awards of the Society.

Possibly, everyone has a different version of democracy. For myself, I always thought that the essence of democracy was the participation of the governed in the process of governing, the manner of selection at differ-
ent times or places being variable and even experimental. I did not think democracy meant equality or sameness. I thought that the key to democracy was freedom of choice, which when exercised for certain tasks or activities leads to inequality, however momentary.

I gather that the point of the criticism is to ensure as wide a base for selection as is workable and to achieve more widespread participation in the affairs of the Society. From the mechanisms given and other more informal ones, there are multiple sources for the selection or filtration process; if desired, more can be added, I hope without built-in whiplash defects. I do not think it is possible for any one person to determine the slate. The only possibility is that the President, as part of his relationship to all Committees, might inject himself into the work of the Nominating Committee. If this has happened in the past, I hope it will not happen from now on.

Wide participation in the work of the Society unfortunately has not been achieved. I think the reason for the reduplication of committee membership is not malignant; it is because of the part-time status of the officers, which leads to hurried appointments, limited knowledge of people known to be capable, and the harassment and pressure of having to do all the business of the Society once a year. The President is of no help—he is busy answering mail or signing hundreds of checks. I shall remember this year as the year I regressed to third-grade Palmer penmanship exercises—but despite all the checks, I'm happy to say my penmanship is as bad as ever. Yes, the criticism of committee replication is just. Last June, I was horrified to find myself, Dr. Wilhelmi, and Dr. Williams on six committees apiece. To set an example, I removed myself from all six and reduced, with their blessings, those of Dr. Wilhelmi and Dr. Williams to two or three. There are about 200 positions in the Society's affairs—about 10% of the membership. Calculation of turnover time would indicate that everyone in the Society can be active in its affairs in about a decade. We need knowledge of capable members willing to serve. It seems that a more straightforward way is to ask everyone who has the time, desire, and ability to state his willingness to serve and to indicate an area of his interest. I realize many would not feel right about it—but simply mail, in a plain envelope, a 3 by 4 index card with your name and committee of your choice to the Executive Secretary. An index will be built up and be very helpful. This would be more constructive than voting for oneself in the preliminary and final ballots.

I am grateful for this spontaneous criticism of committee membership reduplication. I am sure that, except for the necessary duplication called for in the by-laws or for specific continuity or because of collateral editorial board work, the duplication will be duly corrected.

Now, briefly, some comments on the other criticisms. As for regional nepotism, I offer only the Sutton Summation. For the very few of you who don't know it, the Sutton Summation originated with Mr. William Sutton, the notorious bank robber. The proverbial sweet young thing interviewed Mr. Sutton for her Sociology thesis. Finally, she asked: “Mr. Sutton, why do you rob banks?” The startled Willie blinked and replied, “Because, M’am, that's where the money is.” The East Coast has the highest talent per acre, or T/A, ratio; the provinces between Newton Center and the Sierra Nevadas have the lowest. It would be just as wrong to penalize the East because the talent is high as it would be to penalize the Midwest because the acreage is high.

As for neglecting women members, one night at the Laurentian Conference I had dinner at a table where some women members were present; I was told that very few women had been officers. I asked for help and suggestions and promptly transferred these to Alfred Wilhelmi (who has quietly done more for democratization of the
Society than anyone), only to learn that participation of women was constantly considered for a long time, complete with lists. The present slate with two women members is not due to sudden pressure. As Endocrinologists, we should know better than to be guilty of male chauvinism. But it does look as if women and other members of the Society (for example, those in industry) have been invisible to the appointive eye of the management.

Finances

There appears to be widespread misunderstanding of the finances and some dismay about dues, page charges, extra assessments, and appeals for contributions. I agree that nothing is more tiresome than the ever-increasing appeals and assessments. I was taken through our financial affairs recently. They are not difficult. Broadly, the Society has three funds: (1) the Postgraduate Assembly Fund, which represents a negligibly small sum of money; (2) the Koch Fund, which by definition yields an annual sum for the Koch Award and hence is not pertinent except as to its financial management; and (3) the Society Fund (about $200,000), the yield of which plus the annual operating income funds the Society. If we used this capital, we could operate for a few years without any dues; after that, our dues and assessment would be three times as much. So there is no problem about Society finances save one—the management of the capital for the Society's General Fund and Koch Fund. The Society, in a schizophrenic fit of purity, voted from the floor to divest itself of its stock in tobacco and ethical drug companies but not of its stock in a company which not only owns pharmaceutical factories but is the largest producer of Mace and Napalm. The perils of democracy are proclaimed by such sudden, unstudied shouts of vox populi.

I fail to see the difference between membership assessments and the income from ordinary American industry as used by the Society for its functions. Consequently, and because the Treasurer does not relish this responsibility any longer, I hope that the Finance Committee will soon place the Funds in the hands of competent investment management with awareness of the Society's moral wishes. We shall pay a good fee for this service, but it is axiomatic that one gets what he pays for. If we do this, then my only claim to Presidential fame would be that my nagging finally resulted in the Society's Funds being handled by professionals. So, I hope you will not, as is rumored, think that the Society is very rich. It is not; our total assets amount to about $500,000 and the income of this is earmarked as I have indicated. This income is quite modest.

Research Support

An important function the Society can perform today is to exert its influence on Federal research support. Practicing Endocrinologists, teachers, and research scientists (basic or applied) have encountered hard times. As doctors, our image was never worse—the public, one author wrote, approaches the doctor with the same apprehension it does a second-hand car dealer. Besides, the public demands health services on a gigantic scale and wants them theoretically free via the Government. Our professors are targets of criticism from both parents and students in a cross fire. The scientist faces a public hostile and critical of science—anti-intellectual and suspicious in outlook—and a curtailment of funds, by some 40%, which may or may not get better. Our clinicians and applied scientists perhaps live in another economic stratum; it is the research scientist and academic people who are in jeopardy and in need of aid.

The causes of this sad state of affairs are multiple—only in part, do we deserve this. In the early halcyon days of Federal research support, the performance of some Eastern Seaboard advocates in the Halls of Congress and the resulting press reports were remarkable, to say the least; horrible,
to say the most. They made every honest
scientist cringe and avert his eyes. Com-
pounding this, more scientists took to the
lay press and monthly magazines to report
great practical things which, when read by
the public, were palpably not true. This
quest for publicity and the limelight was
even practiced by venerable institutions.
Having the Dean call a press conference to
announce a “breakthrough,” as it is called,
does not make this activity more palatable
or acceptable—it is nothing more or less
than what it is—prostitution of the Dean’s
office. In our confusion, we have substituted
visibility for vision, status for stature, style
for substance. Our scientific credibility has
been badly dented. Our language convulses
with such emotional terms as “meaningful”
and “relevant,” which can be misleading,
pretentious, and therefore phony. Dame
Academe has taken her place in line at the
public till, still, however, protesting her in-
nocence. But she is not innocent. She is
guilty of having obfuscated Federal re-
search support for support of collateral al-
though related activities; she has too will-
ingly abdicated her classic responsibility for
research and scholarship. So now the
chickens have come home to roost because
no one protested with searing honesty and
fearless fortitude.

What to do? At the very least, one can, in
translation of the Lord’s Prayer to con-
temporary language, pray annually for re-
search funds—to the NIH to give us this
year our yearly bread. More effectively,
the Society can combine its resources with
those of other Societies, as we are doing. In
need, leadership seems to arise; Robert
Williams gave able leadership in this direc-
tion by creating the Public Affairs Com-
mittee and transferring its guidance to Dr.
Oppenheimer. Now with Dr. Blizzard, we
have two experts in this area. You can do
best for yourselves as scientists by giving
any idea, any plan, any action, and all your
support to Dr. Oppenheimer.

Personally, I have no experience or talent
in this area. All I can do is to stress a
restoration of our tarnished image as fol-
low:

1. Research, Medicine, Education, and
Science constitute a natural resource and we
are part of this resource.

2. Our national resource rates close to
the top because health and happiness de-
pend on it; how else can we enjoy the fruits
of our tax-exempt or tax-favored fossil
energy industry which fuels our present
culture.

3. Solons, bureaucrats, and politicians
do not have a monopoly on concern for
the nation’s health or scientific capability.

4. We are members of a professional
Society, so let us conduct ourselves with the
quiet confidence befitting true professionals.
And let us apply to our personal and emo-
tional lives the same criteria of science that
we apply to our work—objectivity, honesty,
logic—and not be moved by personal ag-
grandizement, greed, and ego.

5. Our role in Health and Science must
be coordinated with economic and social
elements. Let us not look down our noses
on appropriate leaders in other fields and,
above all, let us not oversell the tax-paying
public. On the other hand, the public does
not understand “Science for Science’s sake”;
even, or rather especially, if it did, it would
reject it flatly.

6. As scientists, we must stand our
ground resolutely. While the taxpayer has a
right to ask about the value of Science, his
leaders have no right to demand, as some
moralists do, clairvoyance of the scientist or
to suppress a possible discovery if it is
“harmful” and to gestate only “beneficial”
ones. If the scientist knuckles under to this
arrogance of ignorance, he deserves the fate
that immediately awaits him.

Perhaps the support of biomedical re-
search in all of its manifestations is the
responsibility of all Science, of which we
are a small part, and a new mechanism
apart from our Society is needed. Our
Society cannot become a squawking minor-
ity lobby unless we choose to abandon it as it is now legally constructed. Basic rights of minorities are a cornerstone of our democracy, but even in this current hyperimmune wave of national hypersensitivity, idiotic minority rights are simply idiotic. To allay some fears expressed, I can assure you that our Society will not turn back the clock and squabble for funds on the basis that our bag is better than theirs, that our diseases are more disastrous than theirs.

Epilogue

Finally, I’ve felt that there is no mechanism whereby the Society’s welfare is continuously under long-term study. I am happy to say that the Council is giving some thought to providing continuity in planning and to modernization of the management apparatus.

At the beginning, I asked you to ask what the Society is doing for you. I did so purposely. If you do this, you will make the Society more vibrant and responsive. But obviously I did not mean it as a personal, selfish creed. If I should ask myself, What can the Society do for me?, the answer is, Nothing really, for in making me its President it already has given me the highest honor of my career.