

Section on Pharmacopœias and Formularies

Papers Presented at the Sixty-First Annual Convention

AN OPEN LETTER FROM PHYSICIANS CONCERNING THE PHARMACOPŒIA.

R. H. NEEDHAM.

To see ourselves as others see us is worth while, provided we pause long enough to give ourselves a careful inspection. Usually a glance is sufficient to either disgust or to add to our stock of egotism, with the result that no decided or radical change for the better is produced. We do not want a distorted or magnified view, for these give false impressions. There is nothing that can supplant the plain truth, though many times we are very loath to accept it.

For years we have gone on revising and revising the Pharmacopœia, doing our best each decade to produce a work better than the last issue and superior to any other in the world. That each successive revision committee has succeeded in its separate undertaking cannot be disputed. The Pharmacopœia of this decade promises to be the best ever issued; yet with all this, may I not ask the question: Is it not a fact that the book has lost ground with physicians during the past ten years? If it has done so, why?

If I saw but slight evidences of indifference and neglect on the part of the medical fraternity, I would not be justified in propounding this question. I have become so certain that such is the condition, that in order to prove some facts, I have sent out a number of letters to physicians subjecting the fraternity to a brief catechising on this subject. Furthermore I wished to know if they were satisfied with the present arrangement, or if they desired any changes. As to the wording and character of the questions I have asked little advice and have worded and arranged them as I thought best. For the outline of the scheme in the proposed hand book I am indebted to the chairman of this section. The men to whom the questions were sent, were selected with three purposes in view. First, no acquaintances were asked, as they were not to be influenced by my own ideas. Second, every state was canvassed, that representative opinions might be obtained. Third, several physicians, who were graduates in pharmacy, were selected, that we might obtain views from men who were familiar with the Pharmacopœia.

QUESTIONS.

1. Do you use the U. S. P. in the practice of medicine?
2. What percentage of drugs U. S. P. enter your prescriptions?
3. Kindly name at least ten reliable drugs most commonly prescribed by yourself.
4. Do you consider the U. S. P. essential to the practice of internal medicine?
5. Would you advocate listing in the U. S. P. all individual drugs used in the treatment of disease?

6. Give your opinion as to the U. S. P. of three volumes as follows:

Volume 1. Consisting of simples only. for chemists.

Volume 2. Consisting of simples and preparations both U. S. P. and National Formulary. for pharmacists.

Volume 3. Consisting of simples and preparations carefully selected and patterned after A. M. A. Hand Book of U. S. P. and N. F. .

7. It is suggested that the following outline be used for drugs in Volume 3. Please comment.

1. Official Latin names.
2. Pronunciation.
3. Genitive in the Latin name.
4. English name.
5. Synonym.
6. Origin in the case of vegetable drug.
7. A concise description.
8. Solubilities.
9. Composition in case of formulas (very general) or constituents in case of vegetable drug.
10. Incompatibilities.
11. Doses.
12. Uses.
- 13 Official preparation in case of simples, with percentage.
14. Average dose of each preparation.
15. Method of administration.
16. The results and conclusions as based on laboratory experimentation, with the original references and name of the investigator, as to therapeutic efficiency of the drug or medicine.

8. Would physicians be profited by the issuance of yearly supplements to the "Hand Book"?

9. Any suggestions that tend to improve the U. S. P. and arouse more interest on the part of the prescribing physician will be acceptable.

Replies to question number one indicate that all use the U. S. P. with but one exception, although quite a few stated that they "consulted the Pharmacopœia occasionally."

Replies to question number two showed practitioners were using from 100 percent to as low as 35 percent. One used 50 percent, while many others gave high percentages.

Question number three gave most interesting replies. Strange to say, one National Formulary preparation was mentioned, and but two new remedies. I beg to comment on this one a little later.

To number four about 65 percent were in the affirmative and about 35 percent negative. As a book of standards all were agreed upon; as a book of reference it was considered as of little use to the physician.

There was practically the same division of opinions as to number five. Some wanted the therapeutic values stated if such a scheme were carried out.

Question number six met with decided favor, as 80 percent were in favor of

such an arrangement. I might add that a lack of information concerning the A. M. A. hand book prevented some from giving positive answers.

Suggestions under number seven brought out surprising results, every reply being favorable. Particularly were they in favor of giving pharmacologic and therapeutic results.

Question number eight showed 70 percent in favor of a "Hand Book" issued yearly. About 30 percent were opposed and one of these suggested a yearly issuance of the National Formulary instead.

The replies to number nine were varied and scattering, but enough information was given to enable one to ascertain the attitude and trend of thought of the physicians toward the Pharmacopœia.

In conclusion I might sum up the results of the canvas as follows:

1. All use the Pharmacopœia more or less; usually less.
2. While the percentage of the U. S. P. drugs entering prescriptions is very high, this may mislead us, as quite a number of doctors consulted were graduates in pharmacy and on the other hand, a canvass of prescription files showed that the major portion of many prescriptions is made up of proprietary or non-official preparations. Physicians are very sensitive on this point and do not wish it known that they are prescribing patents or proprietaries when comparing U. S. P. drugs.

3. The ten reliable drugs as a total were about 50, showing Mercury preparations 60 percent; Strychnine and Morphine each 50 per cent; Atropine, Digitalis, Iron preparations, Arsenic, Epsom Salt, and Hexamethylamine about 45 percent; Potassium Iodide, Chloral, Cascara Sagrada, Quinine, Opium preparations and Mineral Acids 30 percent, and the rest quite scattering.

4. Only as a standard is the Pharmacopœia used by physicians as it is issued at the present time.

5. The majority favor listing of all drugs used under certain conditions as was stated in question number six and suggestion number seven. Physicians are particularly interested in the pharmacologic and therapeutic action of drugs and will consult those works which contain such data when prescribing. A division would seem advisable, if we would secure the attention the Pharmacopœia merits from the physician.

6. That a "Hand Book" would be welcomed by physicians, there can be little doubt, after looking over the returns.

7. I will quote a few suggestions given by physicians: "More ways of giving various drugs in a pleasant and palatable manner"; "Give physicians all the information and instruction possible as to prescription writing—few know anything about it"; "Devise some ways and means whereby the Pharmacopœia can be made more useful and interesting to the physician"; "It is too large a volume for doctors, as a reference book"; "Physicians know very little about the Pharmacopœia"; "Eighty percent of the physicians have never seen a copy of the U. S. P."

I have quoted verbatim and to me it is a frank and clear indication that we must do something to bring this excellent work to the physician's notice, not merely as an authority on drugs but as a practical and helpful work to be used by them in their daily practice.