

Papers Presented to Local Branches

SAFEGUARDING THE USE OF POISONS.*

JOSEPH E. LAUBER, ESQ.

I shall have no occasion in the treatment of the subject of my address to, in any way, offend your vastly superior knowledge and scientific training in the compounding of poisons. I have no doubt that were the dispensing of toxic substances confined to the class of gentlemen I now have the honor of addressing, a far lesser fatality list would be on record than that which appears today. That poisons will find their way into the possession of the careless user is but recognizing the existence of fact, and we must treat the subject clearly comprehending and understanding this fact.

We must bear in mind that great human element—carelessness—which when found in your mentalities must needs be at its minimum, but which forever has existed and ever will exist in the lay mind without much, if any, systematic method or attempt at its control. It is of no extraordinary credit to our better trained minds that we recognize this, and at this time I want to cite an incident which came to my attention during the course of the little time which I have been able to devote to this subject. One druggist who was asked what he thought of a movement to require all those who dispense poisons to, in some uniform and thoroughly distinctive way, indicate their poisonous character, said, "Oh, people will be careless, and if they have not sense enough to keep their poisons separate from their non-poisonous matters they ought to suffer the punishment that goes with it." The narrowness of such attitude will, I believe, immediately appeal to you.

I think we ought never to forget that a spirit of carelessness is but one of the elements of the frailty of human nature, and that all of us are provided with an ample share of that element.

It is and ever will be that those who are blessed with superior knowledge, training and self-control will teach and guide their less favored brethren. Therefore, a great and well-defined responsibility rests upon us who are able to read and observe human nature as it really exists and who are intelligent enough not to expect the ideal in man.

I am quite sure that your opinion and mine are practically at one concerning the good that will result to humanity at large by the use of distinctive methods of indicating poisons. To my mind, the uniformity of such distinctive methods is of the greatest importance. Fundamentally, it is the user who is to be protected and safeguarded, and he must be trained to recognize the symbol of poison. The skull and cross-bones seldom, if ever, fail in their mission of denoting a deadly

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substance. This symbol has become known by all intelligent humanity—yet it appeals to the eye only, and one must naturally see it to receive its warning influence. Effective though it is, the effect of its warning mission usually extends no further than the compounding room of the druggist, and when it reaches the user who, I say again, is the one who really requires protection, it usually comes to him in an ordinary bottle, seldom with the recognized symbol.

What is needed, in my humble opinion, is not only a thoroughly distinctive method of indicating poisons, but a uniformity in that distinctive method, so that within a reasonable time humanity may become educated to the knowledge of these distinctive symbols and will instantly recognize the peril that is there and that death lurks nigh. So I take the liberty of impressing upon you that not only should the toxicants be distinctively indicated, both by shape and color, but that the shape and color should be uniform.

I am in favor of having all poisonous solids of one shape and of dispensing all poisonous liquids in one shaped bottle. I take the liberty of suggesting to your attention and for your consideration as to the solids a shape along the lines of the jackstone, which has a pronounced unevenness on all sides and would be difficult to swallow. There should, of course, be on each package containing poison, a statement giving the antidote, with explanation, in plain language, of the emergency treatment.

Of paramount importance in the constructing and assembling of ideas is the carrying of them into practical operation. I understand that your most creditable association and other associations have, from time to time, adopted resolutions favoring either in whole or in part certain phases of this work. It is of little service to humanity to adopt resolutions unless the advance step is taken, because they reach and therefore influence but a small proportion of those who ought to be interested. Now we must realize that probably the majority of pharmacists, unlike yourselves, who have made this most useful of professions a life study, have as their watchword "Commercialism" and not a scientific development of the profession.

We know that many do not keep abreast of the great developments that are constantly taking place, therefore the work that goes on within the confines of your Association is, as to them, absolutely unavailing. This work must be brought into active play, otherwise the people at large, the users, will remain ignorant of the many precautions that science from time to time provides for their protection.

May I presume upon your indulgence to the extent of suggesting a method which I believe to be the orderly way and the most effective of bringing these ideas into practical operation. It would be well that your worthy body submit the entire question to a committee for its attention and report; that the committee be empowered to draft recommendations for a bill for a proposed law; that when the bill is finally shaped to meet your approval it be sent in for the support of your state body and for such other support as you may command; then it be taken directly to our legislators for their action.

That this great and meritorious object will eventually prevail and be brought into practical operation, there is but little doubt; that some obstacles will be encountered in the path to success is to be expected, nor should we be in the

slightest degree daunted by prior failures. The purpose is worthy; it is good; it is an advance step for the benefit of humanity. It is well for us to meet our responsibilities and to meet them in a way that reflects credit upon us.

I sincerely hope to see the day when your organization, the New York Branch of the American Pharmaceutical Association, will claim the honor that will be the just reward for carrying this progressive movement to the homes and for the benefit of the people.

THE NEED OF AUTHORITY FOR NON-OFFICIAL MEDICAMENTS.*

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There is no doubt that at times we have all found ourselves on the border line of indecision in relation to what is intended when some medicament for which no official standard is extant was requested, and there are many such which find their way through the channels of pharmacy, for which it is impossible to ascertain the facts necessary to intelligent dispensing.

That no such authority exists is surprising, for the need is apparent, and although information is promiscuously scattered throughout the literature relating to pharmacy, this information is far from specific.

Assuming that we do find an abstract or digest on any given subject, we are often in doubt whether the statements are reliable, or whether they are paid advertisements.

The Pharmacopœia and National Formulary occupy their time-honored place under legal authority for all that happened many years ago, but pharmacy progresses and investigators are constantly thrusting new material upon us, either with a view of finding a convenient outlet for their products or with the idea that they may prove of value, and the pharmacist and physician both are confronted with the necessity of distinguishing that which is good from that which is valueless, and hence there is need for some authorized standard that will supply us with the proper information.

Take, for example, a prescription calling for two grains of digitalin to be divided into fifty capsules.

Shall we dispense Digitalin German, Merck's Pure Digitalin, Merck's Crystallized Digitalin, Boehringer's True Digitalin, Digitalin Abbott, French Digitalin, or any one of several other so-called digitalins, the doses of which are given variously as from one-fourth to one two hundred and fiftieth of a grain?

The American Medical Association in 1905 created the Council of Pharmacy and Chemistry, for the purpose of disseminating information regarding such medicaments, such information being transmitted to the medical profession from time to time in the Journal and annually printed in book form.

This work of the A. M. A. is worthy of the highest commendation, but it is a field of work in which pharmacy should be the pioneer and at all times maintain its position in the vanguard of the procession.

The American Pharmaceutical Association claims this as the right of pharmacy,

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