

CONTROL OF HEALING.

State Medical Boards Get Together to Raise Standards.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

The Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States is a new organization which will undertake a work of far-reaching importance to the American public. It is composed of the State boards which have control of the granting of licenses to practice medicine in their respective States. The aim of the organization is to raise the standard of medical education and to show the public how properly to control the practice of all the healing arts and sciences.

There has been much criticism of the general low standard of medical education in this country by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Medical Association. In the majority of the States the boards are vested with the right to pass on the credentials of a candidate for license, that is, to accept for examination candidates from schools maintaining the standard which they have set or to reject those from schools not meeting their standard. But, on account of local politics and the lack of uniformity in standards and medical practice acts, an individual State board has not been able to accomplish as much as could a close national organization.

Many obstacles have been put in the way of these State boards through ignorance or misunderstanding on the part of the general public in regard to the term medicine, which, in a broad sense, relates to the science and art dealing with the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of disease. The public has, in the past, been too ready to listen to the arguments of the ignorant or of charlatans who claim to diagnose or treat disease but not to practice medicine, because it has understood medicine in its narrower sense only, that is, as it relates to that part of the science and art of diagnosing and treating disease which is the province of the physician as distinguished from the surgeon, the obstetrician, and so on. The first step of the federation, then, will be to determine just how much one must know about disease before being permitted to diagnose and treat the same without doing harm to society. At present there are many schools that graduate men and women who set out to diagnose and treat diseases without having had practical experience. The federation hopes to correct this and to protect the poor ignorant patients as well as the so-called poor boy who, the commercial medical schools claim, must be given an opportunity to get a medical education.

By commercial medical schools we mean those schools which are run by their proprietors for the purpose of making money as well as teaching. It is this type of school which has so thoroughly fastened on the minds of the American public the belief that to know disease can be learned from books. So general is this impression that many intelligent men who would not think of employing a mechanic or chemist without wanting to know something of his practical experience think it perfectly right to turn loose with a license to diagnose and treat disease men and women who have had no practical experience and who may do untold harm.

Two methods could be pursued by the States in determining the qualifications of those who claim to know disease; one would be to give a thorough practical examination just as the army and navy do, and the other would be to disregard the individual claimant but to require a diploma from a school that is recognized as up to standard and which controls a definite number of charity bed and dispensary patients per student for the purpose of giving practical instruction and experience. Either one of these methods, if generally adopted by the States, would correct the gross deficiencies of our present system of medical education. It remains for the federation, which is composed of the State boards officially intrusted with these matters, to determine a uniform standard for medical education or examination and to recommend the same to be enacted into law by the State Legislatures and the national Government. In this way the medical profession will secure general reciprocity as to medical licensure between the different States, which is what many desire, and the public will be properly safeguarded from ignorant practitioners and quacks.

It cannot be claimed that the federation is a self-constituted authority, since it is made up of representative official bodies and is free from all factions, cliques, or interests. It has chosen as its first President Dr. Charles H. Cook, who has practiced medicine almost forty years at Natick, Mass. The other officers are Vice President, Dr. Albert de Bey of Orange City, Iowa, who is President of the Iowa State Board; Dr. Otto V. Huffman, Educational Building, Albany, N. Y., who is Secretary of the New York State Board of Medical Examiners; Executive Committee—Dr. James H. Duncan, President of the Ohio State Board; Dr. John M. Baldy, President of the Pennsylvania State Bureau, and Dr. Herbert Harlan, President of the Maryland Board.

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Secretary State Board of Medical Examiners.

Albany, N. Y., July 10, 1913.

The New York Times

Published: July 12, 1913

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