

THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION'S WORK FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION

MORRIS FISHBEIN*

An intelligent and enlightened consumer is a safe consumer. The whole purpose of the work of the various councils and committees of the American Medical Association is not persecution or prosecution of the promoter and the quack, but education of the public as to what is sound in the field of medicine.

The first of the councils of the American Medical Association was the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry. It was established primarily to advise the editor of *The Journal* relative to advertisements for proprietary medicines submitted to *The Journal*, with a view to limiting such advertising to products of known composition and established merit. As a result of this work, it became necessary to establish a laboratory to investigate the products so as to check the composition claimed by manufacturers. As the work grew, it became possible to publish each year a book called "New and Nonofficial Remedies," describing the products that had been accepted by the Council and which were therefore considered suitable for advertising in the publications of the Association.

Since, however, the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry dealt only with ethical proprietary preparations sold to the medical profession the Bureau of Investigation was established to consider the claims made for nostrums and patent medicines sold to the public, and the laboratory of the American Medical Association was used to ascertain the composition of secret remedies, so that the claims made for them might be considered in relationship to their composition.

As this work of the Association developed, new councils and bureaus were gradually established. The Council on Medical Education and Hospitals has begun to be a rating agency for medical colleges and for hospitals, and also for laboratories which supply diagnostic tests and for roentgen-ray laboratories.

The Council on Physical Therapy was established to consider devices in the field of physical therapeutics, such as ultraviolet, diathermy, and hydrotherapy apparatus.

Finally when it became apparent that increasingly foods were being prescribed in the practice of medicine, when it became obvious that the new discoveries con-

* B.Sc., University of Chicago, 1910; M.D., Rush Medical College of the University of Chicago, 1912. Editor, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Hygeia*. Contributor to numerous periodicals; author of *Handbook of Therapy* (with Oliver T. Osborne) (1915); *Medical Follies*, (1925); *Doctors and Specialists* (1930), and many other works.

cerning mineral salts and vitamins would be exploited to the public by manufacturers who would not hesitate to exaggerate the qualities of their wares in order to increase their sales, the Committee on Foods was established to do a similar work in this field.

Unquestionably this philanthropic work on the part of the American Medical Association has meant vast savings in health and life, and a saving of money to the American people. Much of the work of the Consumers' Research and similar organizations is based on this pioneer work by the American Medical Association. It should again be emphasized that no manufacturer is permitted to pay one cent in relationship to the examination of his product and that no member of the public is ever charged for the information that is supplied. The money necessary to carry on this work is made by the publications of the American Medical Association, including principally *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Moreover, from the first, the work of these councils and bureaus has been given adequate support through the publicity department of the American Medical Association, through all of its periodicals, and through the absolutely consistent refusal to accept the advertising of any products that could not meet the standards of the various committees and councils.

It must be realized that the Food and Drugs Act protects the consumer so far as the package of the product is concerned, but bears no relationship to advertising separate from the package. This arrangement has made necessary the work of these councils. It is conceivable that the passage of new food and drugs legislation like that now proposed, which plans to control claims made in advertising as well as claims made on the package, will give the consumer the protection needed.

THE WORK OF THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

ARTHUR J. CRAMP*

The Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association is an outgrowth or by-product of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry, although the Bureau has no connection with the Council. The Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry was brought into being in 1905 for the purpose of subjecting to scientific scrutiny the innumerable proprietary medicines that were offered to the medical profession for prescription purposes and passing on to the profession the results of such investigations. As the medical profession awoke to the way in which it had been deceived and humbugged by the exploiters of unscientific proprietaries, they began also to take an interest in those crude proprietary medicines known colloquially but incorrectly as "patent medicines"—that is, package medicines, usually of secret composition, sold to the public for the self-treatment of self-diagnosed ailments. Repeated and insistent requests for information coming first from physicians and later from the

* M.D., 1906, Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons. Director of Bureau of Investigation, American Medical Association. Author of *Nostrums and Quackery* (1921).