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-

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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

Moreover, from the first, the work of these councils and bureaus has been given
adequate support through the publicity department of the American Medical Asso-
ciation, 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

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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 investiga-
tions. As the medical profession awoke to the way in which it had been deceived
and humbugged by the exploiters of unscientific proprieties, 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 in-
sistent requests for information coming first from physicians and later from the

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