

Pediatrics

VOLUME 29

MARCH 1962

NUMBER 3

COMMENTARY

IATROGÉNESIS PEDIÁTRICA

The following Commentary by Dr. Myron E. Wegman is published on behalf of the Editorial Board and the Editor of PEDIATRICS

UNDER THIS TITLE a distinguished Latin American member of the Academy, Dr. Alfredo Ceballos Carrión, Professor of Pediatrics in the University of Guayaquil, Ecuador, has written an interesting article,¹ reviewing for his colleagues the many ways in which activities of a physician may provoke or enhance disease in a child, during the course of zealous efforts to cure and heal. Among other factors to which Dr. Ceballos refers is that of unwise, ill chosen, or unnecessary medication. Certainly the vastly increased armamentarium of effective drugs at the disposition of modern physicians has opened enormous possibilities for them to benefit patients. Nevertheless, this very abundance of therapeutic agents carries with it, as has been pointed out so forcefully by the former Editor of PEDIATRICS, Dr. Charles D. May, potentiality for considerable difficulty and negation of the results desired. Dr. May emphasized the basic responsibility for medical schools, professional societies, and medical literature, rather than the pharmaceutical manufacturers, to educate physicians in new therapeutic discoveries.

PEDIATRICS, in fulfilling its duty to present to the profession scientific articles of high standard, also carries commercial advertising dealing with therapeutic agents as well

as various other materials related to child care. In reviewing materials for advertising in this or any other journal, those responsible recognize that advertising is fundamentally commercial propaganda frankly designed to present as forcefully and, hopefully, as honestly as possible the merits of a particular product. It is wishful thinking to expect that any advertising can be objective. As a matter of fact, it is naive to expect objectivity in a presentation by a corporation that must, in the long run, be responsive to its owners or stockholders for the conduct of a business. Indeed the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association has recently emphasized, in published statements, that "of course it's 'advertising' . . . a frankly competitive activity of the American private enterprise system to which this industry belongs." To be sure, this commercial aspect in itself acts as a control since, increasingly, American pharmaceutical concerns have wisely recognized the fact that exaggerated claims in the long run lead to dissatisfied customers, lack of confidence, and eventually loss of profits. Unfortunately, irresponsible drug advertising is still far too common, and a way to control it must be found.

It is a major task of the medical educator, and of the scientific journals that are part of his most useful tools, to educate physicians and medical students to their responsibility for critical appraisal of drugs and therapy.

PEDIATRICS, March 1962

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