

EDITORIAL : VAN DIE REDAKSIE

THE FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF OPHTHALMOLOGY, JOHANNESBURG, 1 JUNE 1968

In an age when a medical congress is in session in some part of the world at any time of the year, an ophthalmological congress held in this country may not call for special comment. However, this congress was of a special nature. It was the first International Symposium of Ophthalmology ever organized in this country on the lines which are becoming increasingly popular in other parts of the world—the sessions being addressed by speakers of international repute, with demonstrations and illustrations. Limited discussion is allowed, but free papers are not accepted. In this way one attends a high-class refresher course addressed by the best men from all countries on any particular topic.

In the advance of medical science over the last 30 years, South Africa has not lagged behind. We have a high standard of medical education and medical services. The first medical school of the country, that in Cape Town, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1968. The country, for its population, has certainly produced as many medical scientists of high quality as any other. It is however fair to say that the oldest specialty in medicine, that of ophthalmology, has, until recently, lagged behind in the general advance. This is because ophthalmology has traditionally been very conservative in relation to the rest of medicine and is also regarded, by most other doctors, as a specialty in which they would rather not dabble. It is for this reason that the appointment to the first Chair of Ophthalmology in this country, at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1965, was an occasion of great moment to ophthalmology.

Through the generosity of Sam and Dora Cohen, this chair was liberally endowed, and its first incumbent is Prof. Maurice Luntz, one-time student of the University of Cape Town and more recently of the University of Oxford. It was his enthusiasm and desire to advance ophthalmology in this country and put it on the map, as it were, which led, after several years of organization, to the holding of an International Symposium.

The material which is provided at such a conference can often be a very boring reiteration of what has appeared in print elsewhere. This is not necessarily a disadvantage but the method of presentation is of the first importance. In this respect, the congress could not be faulted. The projection facilities and the public address system were all that could be desired.

The gathering was a resounding success. It was beautifully planned and held in luxurious surroundings in the new President Hotel in Johannesburg. The total number of ophthalmologists attending was 228. Of these, 95 were South Africans and the rest came from all other parts of the world,

including such places as South Vietnam and Pakistan. There were 28 invited speakers. These were men whose names are household words in ophthalmology throughout the world, by virtue of the pre-eminence of their work and publications in English, French, German and Spanish.

Among the main subjects discussed were glaucoma, anterior-segment surgery, retinal detachment and squint. Owing to the time factor it was not possible to attend all the courses on all subjects, because of necessity there was overlapping. This is a criticism that can be levelled at any international gathering today, owing to the abundance of subject matter and the shortage of time.

The social side of this congress was in no way secondary in quality. Not only did the City Council of Johannesburg and the Sam and Dora Foundation entertain the delegates royally on separate occasions but the local ophthalmologists did all they could to make the visitors welcome at parties in their own homes.

Some of the ophthalmological research and surgical equipment today is available only in certain centres and on special order. These were brought to Johannesburg and demonstrated freely throughout the period. The use of the operating microscope with variable magnification together with slit-lamp and cinematograph equipment, all in the same unit, is becoming standard. Whereas many injuries to the anterior segment of the eye in the past resulted in a half-sight, or a vestige of possible sight, owing to scarring obstruction, today we are able to excise scars, replace them with corneal tissue and open up an entrance to the retina which was hardly possible before.

It is becoming a feature of congress life that one does not, in the years of experience, gain a great deal of knowledge from formal presentations, but it is the personal contact and the exchange of ideas during the social gatherings that mean so much to many people. This congress was no exception. The visitors were freely communicative and were keen to help, and to answer questions and give of their experience. In this way this particular congress, bringing together people from all over the world in surroundings which could hardly be improved upon as regards comfort and luxury, certainly came up to the best expectations.

Professor Luntz, with the assistance of the Cohen beneficence, has done this country a great service in organizing such a bright gathering. It is to be hoped, then, that this will be a forerunner of others in the future on similar lines. It is possible today to spend too much time at medical congresses, but it is always profitable to find out what others are doing, how they do it and whether it is done better than one can do it oneself.

INSTRUKSIES VIR SKRYWERS : INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

Die aandag van skrywers word vriendelik gevestig op die nuwe hersiene 'Instruksies vir Skrywers' wat gereeld gepubliseer word. Die jongste voorbeeld verskyn op bl. xxvii van die *Tydskrif* van 8 Februarie. Publikasie van bydraes kan aansienlik bespoedig word as hulle voorberei is in ooreenstemming met hierdie instruksies. Let a.u.b. op dat briewe wat bedoel is vir publikasie in die briewerbriek ook met driemaal spasieëring getik moet word, en gemerk moet wees 'vir publikasie'.

The attention of authors is drawn to the revised 'Instructions for Authors' which will be found on p. xxiv of this issue of the *Journal*. Publication of papers can be expedited considerably if they are prepared in accordance with these instructions. It would be appreciated if letters intended for publication in the correspondence column could also be typed in triple spacing and marked 'for publication'.