

EDITORIAL

Though practised since pre-historic ages, the specialty of neurosurgery is less than 100 years old. It was enabled to develop by the increasing knowledge of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology and by the achievements in anaesthesia and asepsis. The discovery of the excitable cortex by von Fritsch and Hitzig, subsequent research by Ferrier, and the clinical studies of Hughlings Jackson permitted the more accurate localisation of cerebral lesions. Operative techniques were then developed to permit the successful application of this knowledge to the healing or palliation of those patients previously considered to be hopelessly afflicted. The nature of the disease processes were clarified. Men such as Sir Victor Horsley, Sir Geoffrey Jefferson, Harvey Cushing, Walter Dandy and Percival Bailey created the specialty. They correlated the knowledge which the basic sciences offered with the clinical course and pathology of the diseases. They developed new techniques and the operations which they carried out frequently resulted in new knowledge of the nervous system. The specialty is still growing, like all fields of medicine, for many diseases such as malignant tumors and vascular accidents still give disappointing results. Neurosurgery is beginning to converge once again with the fields of neurology and psychiatry. All inquire, directly or indirectly, into Man's nature and his behaviour, and all seek ways of remedying him of the physical limitations of his existence. The results of the research activities of workers in these fields will be fruitful in the years ahead. It is a very exciting period in medicine and particularly in these three specialties. The common bonds between them are very strong and our knowledge of man and the treatment of his ills will greatly benefit by their close co-operation.

In Asia neurosurgery first developed in Japan and Australia and on a small scale in China. Subsequently, units were established in India, Pakistan, Persia and the Philippines. Neuro-surgical procedures have been carried out from time to time in a number of other countries but not in an organized manner and usually not by trained neurosurgeons. Neurosurgery is a distinct specialty, for it requires considerable knowledge of those aspects of

anatomy, physiology, pathology and radiology having to do with the nervous system, and the application of this knowledge to the surgical alleviation of diseases of the nervous system. Training in neurosurgery requires much more than the developing of those manual skills of technique. It requires of the doctor the slow accumulation of information and judgment. And it requires a never-ending curiosity about the nervous system and its afflictions.

An awareness of the need to develop neurosurgical services in the Federation of Malaya prompted the recommendation that the Ministry of Health establish such a unit. In August, 1963, with the aid of CARE-MEDICO, Inc. a neurosurgical unit was opened at the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur. CARE/MEDICO is an American/Canadian organisation sponsored by public donations which enables volunteer doctors and nurses to go to those countries where assistance is sought. Since August the unit has grown considerably. A theatre and basic instruments have been obtained. By the end of March, 1964, two hundred and thirty seven procedures had been carried out. This figure is comparable with the number of procedures done in some of the larger university centers in the United States. Arteriography, myelography and pneumoencephalography are done routinely. Though cranial and spinal trauma constitute about 30% of the patients many cases of brain and spinal cord tumor have been encountered, though frequently advanced and associated with blindness or paraplegia. And yet this is to be expected. Over the following years such lesions will be diagnosed earlier. At the present time pre-operative and post-operative care is improving and there is a slow but heartening decline in the mortality rate. It is hoped that a ward for the neurosurgical unit will be obtained by the end of the year which will result in considerable improvement in the services of the unit. These improvements are permitting more successful attacks on major lesions.

The aim of the unit is not only to provide neurosurgical services but to provide the means whereby Malayan doctors and nurses will be able to assume complete direction and

responsibility for the unit by 1969. Two nurses have been sent to Montreal for a year to learn neurological and neurosurgical nursing. It is planned to send one every two years. It is also planned to send five neurosurgical trainees overseas for a complete course of training, in the hope that by 1973 there will be five neurosurgical centers in the Federation.

The neurosurgical unit here is in its infancy. Much work and a number of years will be required to build it. In the years ahead it is hoped that the development of neurosurgery will make a significant contribution to the medical services of this country and will achieve results which will contribute to the growth of the specialty throughout the world.