Clinical Laboratory Service for Physicians

Laboratory methods now play a large part in the daily work of physicians. Chemical, morphologic, bacteriologic and serologic methods, as well as the roentgen ray, are in daily use everywhere, and new methods, for example, the electrocardiographic determinations and tests of metabolism, are being introduced. To meet the constantly growing needs for such methods, there have come into existence laboratories of health departments and of hospitals, with more or less differentiation into separate departments; also wholly private laboratories. The latter group includes those frequently referred to as commercial, because dependent on fees, and the individual establishments of physicians working alone or associated in groups. The old time pathologist, the prototype of the modern laboratory physician, whose function in clinical diagnosis was to determine the nature of lesions from gross and microscopic examination of tissues, has undergone differentiation into clinical chemist, clinical bacteriologist, clinical serologist, clinical microscopist, and roentgenologist, and there has come forth a formerly unknown adjunct to medical practice, the laboratory technician. So rapid has been the evolution of the clinical laboratory and the extension of laboratory methods in all fields of medicine, that frequently fear is voiced lest much work that should be done by physicians is being entrusted to ... substitutes.

Analyzing the situation, we must reckon first with the fact that the great majority of private practitioners for various reasons, lack of time being an important one, are prevented from making any but the simplest routine tests themselves. Therefore they must turn to some one for help, and the privately owned laboratories offer their services. That there has been an increasing demand for this form of laboratory service is evident from the number of laboratories that have sprung up and developed in recent years. Secondly, it appears that we shall be dependent on this kind of laboratory service for some time at least.

The laboratory features of the proposed health centers or of institutions financed and controlled by the community are attractive to many physicians and are idealistic. They represent a condition in which the same type of service would be rendered to all of the physicians in the community, the cost being reasonable and equally distributed. It might, however, be subject to the charge of representing a further intrusion by the state into medical activities. In any case, the commercial laboratory is an actual fact in our medical practice today. This being the case, the organization, methods and control of such laboratories should receive serious consideration. Physicians are responsible to their patients, i.e., the public, for the character of laboratory service supplied. The results of tests and examinations must be accurate; the fees for such tests must be equitable. The conditions in some of these laboratories are such that thoroughly competent and well-trained physicians have been attracted by the work. It is desirable that similar conditions develop in all laboratories so that well-trained physicians, and not ... technicians, become responsible for laboratory service. These things can be achieved only by satisfactory control. Through this control the laboratories will be capable of rendering services of great value to the medical profession, and those institutions not rendering such service may be suppressed. Any effort whereby clinical laboratories are brought up to reasonable and fair standards is to be recommended. As to the ideal method of control, there can be no difference of opinion; it should be the function of the organized medical profession.

The Magnetic Field is Not a Health Hazard

Magnetism is a word before which the untutored stand aghast and with which the faker may conjure. Among the growing number of therapeutic projects constantly being brought to the attention of the American practitioner, “magnetotherapy” has not acquired any recognition, although it has actually received mention in medical literature. There are industries in which workmen may be exposed to magnetic fields of considerable strength in the course of the operations in which they are engaged; hence the problem of possible physiologic effects cannot be lightly brushed aside. Drinker and Thomson of the Laboratory of Applied Physiology at the Harvard Medical School have recently conducted tests which, although the results are entirely negative in character, may serve to allay any fears about the intangible menace of large magnets to human welfare. None of their experiments on sensitive surviving tissues like muscles and nerves, on blood, or on intact animals gave the slightest evidence of physiologic effects from the magnetic field. Hence is [sic] should not be included among the health hazards.