

XXIII INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE  
LONDON, 2-9 SEPTEMBER, 1972

OVER 600 delegates attended the University of London and the Wellcome Institute for the XXIII Congress of the International Society of the History of Medicine. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was Patron and Dr. F. N. L. Poynter the President. More than 350 papers were delivered, the most popular topic being a traditional congress theme of relations between medicine in the host country (Britain) and other countries.

In addition to the short, fifteen-minute communications, the sessions were highlighted by two special symposia—on Concepts of Clinical Medicine (e.g., theory and therapy of inflammation, and Galilean concepts of disease) and on the History of Provision for Health and Welfare (e.g., medical care in Sweden, Germany and the U.S.A.). The success of these owed much to the commentators, chosen to lead and stimulate discussion. Consideration is being given to continuing this new type of session at the 1974 Congress in Budapest. Two sessions were devoted entirely to Medicine and the Humanities. The key promoter of these sessions, Professor Verdoorn of Utrecht, requested, in his opening address (read in his absence), that future congresses should include this topic.

Possibly deserving similar consideration are specialist sections, such as the history of dentistry which had a very popular Congress meeting, ranging from the manufacture of false teeth to the professional standing of dentistry in nineteenth-century Britain.

The presence of the Congress in London for the first time in fifty years provided a welcome opportunity to show congressionists some of the innumerable byways of British medical history. Lectures, brochures and visits covered a wide spectrum of the London scene, including medical statues, a nineteenth-century operating theatre, once part of St. Thomas's Hospital, but now to be found in the Chapter House of Southwark Cathedral, the seventeenth-century premises of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, and the exciting new building of the Royal College of Physicians. The richness and complexity of British medical history was further highlighted by special Congress tours to Oxford and Cambridge (which provided, until the last century, the only English university training in medicine) and to the south coast resort of Brighton where congressionists learnt something of the little-known story of the medical advocacy of sea-water and how that contributed to the rise of seaside resorts in Britain.

The Congress included many receptions at London medical societies and hospitals. At the farewell Congress banquet at the Dorchester Hotel, Dr. Poynter, reinforcing his remarks made at the colourful Inaugural Session, mentioned the recent healthy growth of medical history in Britain, to which he has contributed so much. The state of medical history in other countries was reported on at the business session of the International Society. By and large, it was an encouraging account auguring well for the future of the subject and the continued success of the International Society and its Congresses.

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