

June 17, 1981

News

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*****Doctor warns against reducing number of neurosurgeons.

DALLAS--Neurosurgeons have been one of the first groups of medical specialists to ask themselves if their numbers are exceeding the demand.

A recent report by GMENAC (Graduate Medical Education National Advisory Committee) to the director of Health and Human Services indicates an expected "surplus" of neurosurgeons in the U.S. by the year 1990. Currently there are approximately 3,500 neurosurgeons in this country.

From the ranks of neurosurgery also comes an occasional comment that the profession should be able to curb its growing numbers. Some believe competition is getting too stiff and that this country cannot financially afford to train and support an increasing number within the specialty.

Dr. Kemp Clark, recently installed president of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and professor and chairman of the Division of Neurosurgery at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, warns against drastically cutting back. "Clearly, some regulation of the production of neurosurgeons is in the public's and even the specialty's interest, but I'm a believer in the cutting edge of competition. Also I'm never quite sure you can equate the number of physicians to the workload accomplished.

"Quality of care should be raised in discussions on reducing the number of new trainees."

Clark says that the population segment requiring the greatest amount of neurosurgical care is the group over 45 years of age. Excluding trauma, the neurosurgical diseases, (tumors, aneurysms, strokes and degenerative spine disease) have their highest incidence among this segment. With the country's lowered birth rate, this age group is ever increasing, Clark points out.

As project officer of a neurosurgical survey funded by the National Institutes of Health, he says that "medicine should pay more attention to distributing the brightest to a given specialty rather than trying to determine limits to its numbers." (Clark's AANS survey was one of three which took an in-depth look at the question of neurosurgical manpower.)

"The medical profession is constantly belabored by statements that it is unresponsive to societal needs; that physicians tend to select areas that are affluent, culturally franchised and climatically endowed for practice." But he expresses satisfaction with the geographic accessibility of neurosurgeons. With the exception of some remote spots in the western United States, there is virtually no place in the country more than two hours away from a neurosurgeon, he says.

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Neurosurgeon population

Clark received his M.D. degree from The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 1948 and was trained in neurosurgery at the Neurological Institute of New York. He has been associated with Southwestern since 1956.

The AANS was founded 50 years ago as the Harvey Cushing Society and has come to represent most of this country's board certified neurosurgeons. In 1965, recognizing the need for a unified voice for American neurosurgeons, it became spokesman organization for the medical specialty. It publishes the "Journal of Neurosurgery" and it provides government agencies and other legislative bodies with information and help in neurosurgical matters.

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