

PHYSIOLOGY AS A PURE SCIENCE

Most of the studies in Physiology are motivated by a desire to learn the abnormal. Physiology is learnt so that it can be applied to medicine. While knowledge of Physiology is essential to a medical student this should not be the be all and end all of learning the subject.

Physiology has a rightful place of its own amongst the modern sciences. In fact it may be submitted that it has suffered somewhat because of its intimate relation with medicine. Medical students and perhaps teachers of the subject in medical colleges look upon the study of this subject only as a means to understand medicine and thereby unconsciously come to disregard the deep thoughts and basic principles underlying it. Being generally reluctant to enter into anything that smacks of a touch of mathematics, the medical students and even their teachers avoid all quantification in Physiology. This leaves only a superficial mark of the subject on them and they in turn are hardly able to contribute to its growth.

Fullest development of Physiology, it is feared, can never occur in the environs of a medical institution. Unless the subject is given the status of a basic science in line with Physics, Chemistry etc. and chairs established for the subject at the University level its treatment would continue to be what it is now.

Establishment of good honours degree courses with postgraduate and post-doctoral research degrees in the University departments of Physiology, in much the same way as with bio-chemistry in some universities, seems to be necessary to give Physiology its due status in the field of science.

It can flourish as a fundamental science only if it is not confined to the four walls of a medical college which is mainly, if not entirely, concerned with picking up what is relevant to medicine and considering everything else as rather highbrow or sophisticated and too high for medical students.

It may be emphasised that what is visualised as pure Physiology to-day is not unlikely, as has happened in many other cases, to be of practical use tomorrow. Plea for creation of departments of Physiology outside the confines of medicine is only made to allow it to grow irrespective of its immediate and even remote applicability to medicine.

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