

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA MEDICAL CENTER  
LOS ANGELES 24, CALIFORNIA

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
DEPARTMENT OF PEDIATRICS

September 14, 1960

Victor McKusick, M.D.  
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Dear Victor:

I must apologize for the delay in writing to you in regard to an evaluation of the course. Unfortunately, I seem to have mislaid the evaluation sheet, so will have to summarize my feelings in a narrative manner.

From an overall standpoint, I enjoyed the course very much. I thought it was quite well balanced in terms of the genetic concepts that were presented. This does not mean that I agree with some of the concepts, but they appear to be necessary for a total evaluation of the field. It would seem that the type of material to be presented will depend upon two variables; the staff that are giving the course, and the students who are selected for the course. It seems to me that you must fix one of these variables and then select the other variable to suit. If the staff are going to be heavily orientated towards biochemical genetics and cytogenetics, then the audience should be selected from those applicants who are working in closely related areas. I realize that this is somewhat counter to the idea "something for everyone" but on the other hand, I think it would do a better job of getting certain areas of genetics more into focus.

I particularly enjoyed those sessions which dealt with biochemical manifestations of a gene or the clinical manifestation of a gene. It seems to me that these areas offer the greatest possibility in the field of clinical medicine. Although I was very interested in hearing about them, I was considerably more bothered by the discussions on many of the commoner diseases, for example, cancer, mental illness, diabetes, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorders. I am not underestimating their importance by any means but I am not convinced that genetics, as it stands today, has a great deal to offer in the study of these diseases. These opinions may reflect my own orientation as a pediatrician.

I particularly enjoyed the discussions on biochemical genetics by Barton Childs and Jim Sidbury. Also the discussions of hemoglobins by Parke Gerald, the biochemical markers by Ned Boyer and the discussions on radiation mutation by Earl Green and Bentley Glass. Bill Young's discussion on miosis and meiosis were also excellent. The discussions on the myopathies were good and I thought Dr. Roderick did an excellent job in discussing quantitative inheritance. Dr. Fuller also did a masterful job in presenting a very difficult subject.

The discussions on congenital malformations left me rather perplexed. They were primarily teratological and morphological presentations and it seems to me that

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there is a good deal of work going on at a somewhat more basic level. Perhaps if more attention had been given to morphogenesis and genetic control, systems of induction, etc, the presentation might have been more valuable. I am not criticizing the work and material that was presented nor the abilities of the discussants. It is more a matter of the orientation of the discussion.

Much of the work on mouse genetics was somewhat disappointing. Again, this is not a reflection of discussant or his material but more of the orientation. For all of the number of alleles that have been identified in the mouse, there was absolutely no discussion or point made of chromosomal organization. Perhaps this is not possible based on the data but I think some discussion could have been indicated on this very important problem. Furthermore, I do not think that discussions of large numbers of phenotypes such as coat, color, etc, are a fruitful approach.

The ophthalmology discussion was very inadequate and I think that this was recognized by most of the audience. I was also bothered by some of the large statistical surveys concerning familial aggregations in certain diseases. It would appear that the genetic component here is a very minor one and I don't think the subject bears as much time as was allotted. This does not underestimate its importance but rather focuses more attention on what is important to the individual interested in medical genetics.

Although I recognize how difficult it is to re-design such a course as this, and still keep it within two weeks, I think that more attention could be given to biochemical genetics, radiation genetics and perhaps cytogenetics. The lectures which dealt with some of the fundamentals of mendelian genetics for example, meiosis and mitosis, segregation of the genes, linkage, etc, should be retained because I think they serve as excellent orientation material. Perhaps some time might be given DNA and RNA synthesis, coding, etc. Again this should be in the nature of an orientation lecture.

The discussion groups did not go too well with the exception of the one on biochemical genetics which Parke Gerald directed. This was always well attended and there was an excellent discussion. The others seemed to sort of drift apart after a few minutes. A good deal of this was because the area for the meeting place was not too appropriate and a blackboard was not available as well as chairs, etc. Perhaps it would be better to have those discussion groups in smaller rooms. Also, they should be far enough apart so that distractions of people moving about are minimized.

The course was of great value to me in many ways. First, I think I developed better concepts of mode of gene action through the lectures of Parke Gerald, Childs, and Sidbury. Secondly, I picked up a good deal of information that I have not yet been aware of. Thirdly, I picked up a great deal of information of disorders that I had never really looked into. Fourthly, the material that was given out either as summary information or as bibliography was all excellent and very appropriate. For example, your abstracts in the Journal of Chronic Diseases were very good and I am sure that I will use these two issues constantly. Fifthly, I think that the course helped me to organize my material in much better fashion in lectures that I give to students and house staff. Lastly, I think I got some good ideas from talking to people about future research in mental deficiency. I hope that you will go ahead with plans to hold this conference on a yearly basis. I think that it is an excellent

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idea, that it would be well received, and that many people will benefit from it. I hope that I have not seemed unduly critical or have embarrassed anyone. All of the students that I spoke with enjoyed the course very much. It was a fine group of people and well worth meeting.

My best to everyone in the department and to your wife. I don't know whether I will be back to Baltimore this winter or not but if so I would certainly stop in to see you. Once again thanks very much for everything.

Very sincerely yours,



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Pediatrics

SWW:lm