

## Letters To The Editor

October 1, 1962.

Mr. Editor:

I should like to bring to the fore a subject of considerable interest and value to the medical student—the fraternity. It is my hope that this letter will incite sufficient interest and argument to warrant its original presentation.

What is a fraternity? In original concept it was a group of young men with similar ideals and often differing opinions who banded together to reap the rewards of a mutual association and their collective intelligence. What a noble thought, and what a valuable one!

Today, our heads clouded with mortgages and status symbols, little of the original Hippocratic stuff finds room in our minds. To the medical student, a fraternity of a professional nature is of great value. Here are his friends, his circle of colleagues with whom he lives, discusses, works and plays. This sounds fine were it the case, but, unfortunately, we have fallen victim to a shameful and worthless game. The method by which prospective students are selected for membership is known as “rushing”; this word implies what, in alarming fact, results. Let us not fool ourselves—it is a great delusion to believe that everyone who has been selected for admission to medical school is of superior intelligence and is, in fact, a very decent fellow.

Once each of the fraternities succeeds in gathering as many candidates as possible from the clutches of the other, the process becomes even more degrading. At first, the “rushee” is subjected to a confusing table d’hôte of goodies—candies and coffee, and parties with endless line-ups of small white nurses. Then, once he has surrendered, his name must be subjected to the vote.

This is a barbaric procedure and a useless one. The sole basis for admittance in the majority of cases is how many times the candidate has eaten at the chapter house, or of how much free beer he has availed himself. If he is not known by the majority or if someone says, “Well, he’s sort of a quiet chap—”, his chances of being admitted are slim. Pasteur and Lister were “sort of quiet chaps”.

We have gone sadly astray. Before anyone is admitted he should be sought after for his qualities of leadership and dedication and sincerity and kindness. These are the kind of members we want. Let us abandon this ridiculous scheme of “rushing” and change it to one of searching for the qualities I have mentioned. There are many fine people in our fraternities, but there are also those who are weak links. In our hurry, we tend to forget those principles upon which our profession is based, and I would like to quote Sir William Osler:

“The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head. Often, the best part of your work will have nothing to do with potions and powders, but with the exercise of an influence of the strong upon the weak, of the righteous upon the wicked, of the wise upon the foolish”.

Our fraternities should be a part of the training for this staggering task.

Thank You.

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