

Unproven Methods of Cancer Treatment

The following statement concerning the Nichols Escharotic Method, proposed for the treatment of cancer by Dr. Nichols Sanatorium, and Savannah Cancer Clinic, Savannah, Missouri, was recently distributed to the 58 Divisions of the American Cancer Society for their information.

Nichols Escharotic Method

After careful study of the literature and other information available to it, the American Cancer Society has not found evidence that treatment with the Nichols Escharotic Method results in objective benefit in the treatment of cancer.

The following is a summary of information on the Nichols Escharotic Method in the American Cancer Society files:

The Dr. Nichols Sanatorium, using the Nichols Escharotic Method, was founded by Perry Lewis Nichols, M.D., at Savannah, Missouri, in 1914. The Sanatorium closed in 1957. Shortly thereafter, reports were received that two osteopaths formerly employed at the Sanatorium, Drs. Robert F. Sutter and L. Kerns, had started a clinic using the same preparation. In 1966, the clinic operated by these two doctors was called the Savannah Cancer Clinic.

Therapy

The Nichols Escharotic Method was almost entirely confined to the use of escharotic pastes of arsenical and/or zinc compounds. It was reported that plastic surgery was occasionally done after treatment of this type at the Sanatorium. Apparently none of the pastes used for treatment were sent outside the institution, although patients from many states went there for treatment.

In information distributed by the Nichols Sanatorium in 1955, three types of patient charges were discussed. The "hospital charge" varied from \$40 up per week, depending on whether the patient was able to go to the dining room for meals, must be served on a tray, or needed extra nursing care, etc. The "treating fee" might vary within the range of \$75 to \$350, depending upon the work required, and included "the responsibility of taking care of any future trouble along this line, so long as there is any possible chance of cure." The "laboratory fee," usually around \$10, covered routine laboratory tests. The examination was

free, and no appointment was necessary for either examination or treatment. The time required for treatment varied, ranging from one to four weeks.

While the Sanatorium was in operation a book, *Cancer: Its Proper Treatment*, of approximately 350 pages with numerous illustrations both in color and monotone was published annually. Approximately one eighth of this book described the treatment and the reasons for preferring it to all others. The other seven-eighths gave testimonials and a "List of Cured Patients," arranged alphabetically by state.

Proponents

The Dr. Nichols Sanatorium was founded by Perry Lewis Nichols, M.D., at Savannah, Missouri, in 1914. According to the Bureau of Investigation now known as the Department of Investigation, of the American Medical Association, in its *Cancer Cures and Treatments*, 1933, Perry Nichols' interest in treatment of cancer was aroused when he was a young man selling real estate in Kingsley, Iowa, by observing "an advertising 'cancer cure' outfit," which was operating in nearby Cherokee. In 1896, he, together with the men from Cherokee, opened a sanatorium in Des Moines. "They treated one patient—unsuccessfully—and then the partnership was dissolved." In November 1896, Mr. Nichols started treating patients who had, or thought they had, cancer, keeping within the law by engaging a licensed practitioner to assist him. In 1901, he obtained a medical diploma from the University of the South Medical Department, a class C institution which went out of existence in 1909.

He began practicing medicine in 1901 in Watertown, South Dakota, and later moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Within 18 months he opened his first "cancer cure sanatorium" at Hot Springs, South Dakota, which he operated until 1914. He also opened a branch at Excel-

sior Springs, Missouri, but Excelsior Springs passed an ordinance that resulted in Dr. Nichols' leaving the town.

In 1914, he opened the Dr. Nichols Sanatorium, Inc., in Savannah, Missouri, which he operated until his death in 1925. Following his death, the Sanatorium was owned and operated by his daughter, Mrs. Helen Nichols Poston, Superintendent, and her husband, Mr. R. C. Poston, General Manager. As of 1950, J. A. Ottman, M.D., and S. E. Simpson, M.D., were serving on the staff.

In July 1956, a letter received from a real estate firm in Kansas City, Missouri, stated that the owner had indicated he might sell the Sanatorium and retire, "although the hospital is in operation as a going and successful profitable hospital." According to this letter, the property consisted of 72 acres, on which was a four story and basement building of steel and concrete construction, having 55 rooms on each floor. There were five residences, a nurses' home with 50 beds, and various other buildings on the grounds.

In September 1959, a letter from the American Medical Association stated: "According to reliable information, the property of the Nichols Sanatorium at Savannah, Missouri, was sold in January 1957. . . . It is our understanding, however, that two of the osteopaths who were on the staff of the Nichols Sanatorium—Robert F. Sutter and L. R. Kerns—are now operating from a motel in Savannah."

In October 1966, information was received that the Savannah Cancer Clinic had been established about a block from the original site by R. F. Sutter, D.O. and an associate.

According to the *American Osteopathic Association Directory of Osteopathic Physicians*, 1960, L. R. Kerns, Box 244, Savannah, Missouri, was born in 1915, graduated from Kirksville College of Os-

teopathy and Surgery, Kansas City, Missouri, in 1940, and in 1960 was "Temporarily Retired."

The same *Directory* reported that Robert F. Sutter, 905 Price Street, Savannah, Missouri, was born in 1920, graduated from the Kirksville College of Osteopathy and Surgery in 1948, and gave no practice information in 1960.

Investigation

Sometime before 1933, the Bureau of Investigation of the American Medical Association, "with the aid of the physicians of a county in Missouri, undertook to investigate all of the cases of patients whose names were given as coming from that county. Fifty-five cases were studied. Investigation disclosed that forty-seven of the fifty-five patients were still living; eight were . . . dead. Of the fifty-five, forty-three had had the diagnosis of cancer made, not by independent physicians, but by the Nichols concern itself! Three of the patients had their cases diagnosed as cancer by physicians, but no microscopic examination had been made, the diagnosis being clinical only. In a few of the other cases detailed information could not be obtained."¹

In 1943, Drs. L. V. Ackerman and T. P. Eberhard reviewed the results of 38 cases which had been treated by escharotic pastes, 19 of them at the Nichols Sanatorium.² Many of those showed disfiguring scars, and recurrences were present in all but three. In these three there either had been no biopsy or it was negative.

State and Local Action

Information received in 1966 by the American Cancer Society indicated that several attempts had been made by the medical profession, the Osteopathic Association, and the State Board of Healing Arts to close the Savannah Cancer Clinic, but that so far the efforts have not been successful.

References

1. *Cancer Cures and Treatments*. Chicago: American Medical Association, 1933.

2. Ackerman, L. V., and Eberhard, T. P.: *Treatment of tumors by escharotics*. *J. Missouri M.A.* 40: 163-166, 1943.

Bibliography

The Nichols sanatorium, another advertising cancer concern using escharotics. *J.A.M.A.* 101: 1818-1819, 1933.

The treatment of tumors with escharotics. *J.A.M.A.* 122: 949, 1943.