
EDITORIAL

A History of Pediatric Specialties

This month, *Pediatric Research* is pleased to begin a series of articles on the history of the development and achievements of pediatric specialties. Dr. Larry Finberg and Dr. Richard Stiehm co-chaired the development of the series, which was the initiative of the American Pediatric Society. This is an important series since history teaches us what has been done in the past and thereby what can be done in the future.

Early in the 20th century, pediatrics was first accepted as a distinct specialty – one that was defined and developed by physicians with the conviction that children and their diseases require the attention of those who are specifically skilled in their care.

Pediatrics, as a separate specialty, led to many advances in childcare, including eradication of rickets and scurvy, universal immunization, prevention of TB, and the establishment of proper nutrition standards. The establishment of the specialty of pediatrics also led to the understanding of the importance of high standards of child care and improved medical education. Finally, it brought together physicians and scientists who shared a common goal, leading to the establishment of pediatric societies in many countries.

Eventually, pediatric specialties developed as a sub-set of pediatrics. This development resulted in new pathways for achievement.

When I entered the field of pediatrics in 1953, few pediatric specialties existed, although there were many pediatricians who focused on those fields that did exist and who made major contributions to the advancement of child health. Our history series describes the work of those pioneers. It also examines the exciting advances that have occurred in the most recent 50 years as the expertise of clinicians and scientists developed in a greater number of specialized fields of pediatrics.

The advances in pediatrics, which have occurred during the past 50 years, are extraordinary. Fifty years ago, no pediatric or neonatal intensive care units existed, cardiac surgery was just developing, and leukemia and most childhood malignancies could not be cured. At that time poliomyelitis, measles, and Rh disease were major problems. Now they can be prevented and – in most developed countries – they are rarely seen.

With advances in specific fields of pediatrics, the need for trained specialists became evident. Thus, pediatric specialties evolved as the next major step in the care and study of

childhood diseases. Our series describes the development of those specialties, including the creation of societies and publications to further the study and care of specific childhood disorders.

While the history of past developments in pediatrics is exciting and encouraging, there are still many more problems to be solved. Undoubtedly, new pediatric specialties will appear as clinicians and scientists work to further understand disease and provide cures for disorders that still afflict children. Recently developed specialties include: transplantation for the cure of malignancies and genetic disorders; gene therapy for the definitive cure of genetic diseases; nutritional and infectious diseases of developing countries; prevention of genetic disorders; and fetal medicine.

Despite having distinct features, the existing and developing specialties of pediatrics share some common interests and approaches. Every specialty is involved in the care and study of developmental disorders and therefore all are interested in the fundamentals of developmental biology. All specialties are interested in the role of genetics in the etiology of disease, in the response to therapy and in the prevention of disease. These common areas highlight the need to bring together specialists in different fields. This need has been recognized by the American Pediatric Society/Society for Pediatric Research who have arranged to have pediatric specialty societies' meetings together with the annual meeting of Pediatric Academic Societies. This affords the opportunity to share information across specialties.

We at *Pediatric Research* also recognize the need to bring together specialists. We continue to endeavour to publish a broad range of articles of interest to those in many specialties – indeed, to all those studying and caring for children and diseases of childhood.

The series of articles about the history of pediatric specialties tells us what has been done and how. It encourages us to search for and study the existing needs of children and gives us confidence that our future endeavours will be fruitful, just as they have been in the past.

Alvin Zipursky
Editor-in-Chief