

or the division of fees between consulting surgeons and physicians, or physicians and consulting physicians.

Judging from the papers which have recently been published, and the reports of the committees which have been appointed to enquire into the subject,¹⁰ this reprehensible practice appears to have become exceedingly common. It is increasing to an alarming extent amongst the younger members of the profession, and has even been adopted in some cases by men of good standing, owing to the fact that it suits their convenience and that they find it profitable.

The division of the fee is accomplished by various methods, and is based on commercialism alone. It means nothing more or less than the payment by the consultant of a commission to the general practitioner, with the object of encouraging the latter to continue to send his patients where he is most likely to receive a share of the money paid for relief or attempted relief, irrespective of the skill and experience of the consulting surgeon or physician in question. The practice is even more common amongst surgeons than physicians, and is carried on without the knowledge of the patient, who is ignorant that a portion of the money, amounting, according to the report of the committee of the Erie County Medical Society,¹¹ to from 25 to 50 per cent., goes to the general practitioner who has recommended the surgeon.

There can be no question that it is a pernicious system, fundamentally opposed to the ethical traditions of the profession, and that it cannot be advocated by any honorable man. It represents a form of collusion between the consultant and the general practitioner, which is compromising and demoralizing to both parties, in that it is invariably practised without the knowledge of the patient, and is at the same time disadvantageous to the latter.

As regards the causes responsible for the prevalence of this evil, it is stated in the report referred to above that the committee was practically unanimous in the opinion that the principal predisposing factors in commercialism are the overcrowding of the medical profession, a low standard of medical education, and a lack of appreciation of professional ethics. The committee also includes amongst the contributory causes contract practice and its inadequate remuneration, and the fact that the general practitioner is often underpaid. This state of things should be rectified in a legitimate manner, by educating the public to understand that, in view of the advances in medicine and surgery, and the consequent increase in responsibility and work necessitated by modern methods of diagnosis, the general practitioner is justified in demanding a