

Using this as an introduction, I shall endeavor to review the subject, which I believe is one greatly overlooked by many practitioners. Up to 1909 the total number of recorded cases is only two hundred and twenty-five, yet I am convinced that the condition is not an uncommon one; the only conclusion being that it is often overlooked or more probably diagnosed as some other condition.

Dilatation of the stomach in some of its more or less chronic forms we are all familiar with, but dilatation coming on suddenly and accompanied by symptoms so alarming, I venture to state, is not so quickly recognized. The cause of this condition is as yet somewhat obscure. There have been many theories advanced, none of which are entirely satisfactory.

The two main theories are (1) a mechanical obstruction due to a prolapse of the small bowel into the pelvis, thus causing a mechanical pressure of the mesentery upon the duodenum as it crosses the spinal column. Experimentally this has been produced by a rope attached to the mesentery in the cadaver and drawn through the pelvis with a weight attached. By this it was estimated that the weight of the small bowel in the pelvis was sufficient to cause enough obstruction to produce an acute dilatation. Against this theory is the fact that the small intestines are often found prolapsed into the pelvis yet acute dilatation is not found. Again in many of the autopsies no compression or distention of the duodenum has been found.

Another theory is that it is due to a paralytic condition of the nervous supply of bowel and stomach. In proof of this is the fact that acute dilatation can be produced in dogs by section of the vagi, and also that it often occurs following an anaesthetic or injury where there is shock. Nervous influence might explain those cases following a blow on the head, and pressure on the vagi might also explain those cases occurring during pneumonia or pleural exudates. The truth of the matter is probably a combination of both factors; one factor being more prominent in one case, another in another.