

SPECIALIZATION

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A standard complaint about today's medicine is that of its fragmentation into specialties and super-specialties. The criticism comes not only from the general public but also from some segments within the ranks of medicine itself. It is usually accompanied by a nostalgic longing for the return of the gentle, old-fashioned, father-confessor type of family physician. This is something like yearning for the bumbling old handy-man, jack-of-all-trades, with his kit of saw, hammer, pliers, nails and a few pieces of old wire and string, and turning him loose on the innards of a modern jet engine or electronic computer. The idea is attractive, but the results are not likely to be spectacular.

It can certainly be argued justifiably that there are many evils inherent in over-specialization. In our field of medicine, abuses of specialization are partially responsible for the public's disenchanted concept of "the Doctor" today, and they have helped to shatter the pedestal on which he was once perched and to reduce it to an almost imperceptible, ground-level pile of rubbish.

It should be remembered, however, that specialization was not invented by the medical profession and is not an evil common to medicine alone. It is plainly a disease of our times and is prevalent in nearly every field of modern activity.

Last month, while watching that second game of the Giant-Dodgers playoff, we, like the critics of medicine, succumbed to the common nostalgia. We found ourselves despairing the state of modern baseball and wishing for a return to the old-fashioned game—the old game that used to be played by nine men on each side and that was over and done with in two hours or less; where a pitcher was lifted only if blasted out of the box, or occasionally for a pinch hitter in the last of the ninth.

Although baseball held out longer than did football, it is apparent now that the once great American pastime has also become a game of specialists and super-specialists. In that particular playoff contest, which lasted for an interminable four hours and eighteen minutes, no less than forty-two players were used, including thirteen pitchers, seven pinch hitters and two pinch runners; in addition, there were innumerable appearances of managers and coaches, most of whom seemed to be Durocher in perpetual motion. One pinch hitter, who was substituted for the lead-off batter at the start of an inning, was himself removed for another pinch hitter after the side had batted around and his turn came up again in the same inning. We thought the climax came in the last of the ninth when, after several prolonged deliberations on the field between manager, coaches, umpires and players, the eighth Giant pitcher was brought to the mound in order to give

the seventh pinch hitter an intentional walk.

Like baseball, medicine has its counterparts for those left-handed, bullpen relief artists who specialize in bucket-footed, right-handed batters and a fast move toward first against fleet-footed runners. Unfortunately, modern living being what it is, we both seem to be stuck.