

JOYS OF URBAN MEDICINE
(Originally published August 1966)

Last month we spent four days in New York City at a meeting of the Continental Gynecologic Society, a smallish specialty, travel club. One day was spent at St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village, another at Roosevelt Hospital in midtown Manhattan and a third at the Greenwich Hospital in suburban Greenwich, Connecticut. It was the first time in several years that we had spent more than a passing-through day in the Big City. We can report that in spite of the demolition, new construction and constant change, "It will be a nice place if they ever get finished building it." It never changes much.

The natives and the adopted natives (these latter outnumber the rest) in medical circles still remain so isolated and insulated in self-centered naiveté that few have any conception that worthwhile civilization can exist beyond the banks of the Hudson. The Associate Professor, after presenting a detailed paper on some bit of advanced clinical research, is always taken aback when the hick physician from Oklahoma gets up and comments that they have been using the method for the past ten years in Tulsa and have found that it gives pretty good results. His reaction is always one of condescending disbelief. And his comment, "Well, isn't that remarkable," usually concludes the discussion.

The great medical centers in New York, all concentrated within a radius of a few miles, might just as well be continents apart. In spite of the most sophisticated and extensive communication system imaginable, exchange of information and ideas between these centers could better be carried on through Pony Express. The doctors, in particular, live a peculiar and circumscribed life. A taxi ride from the apartment in the morning to one hospital. A taxi ride to the office at noon and a four-block walk back to the apartment at the end of the day. Or, up at six in the morning, an hour's drive in from Pelham Manor to the hospital, a day there and at the nearby office and an hour's drive back home (after the rush hour) in the evening. The friend who lives in Brooklyn Heights and teaches at the Downstate Center has no contact with the friend who lives on East 62nd and teaches at Cornell, or the one at St. Vincent's, St. Luke's, French or Presbyterian and, in most instances, except for a vague recollection of the name, is not aware that these are still in operation. There is no question in the mind of any of them that the medicine practiced in New York, by them and at their own particular center, is the ultimate, the most advanced and the absolute last word.

Like everything else in New York (we had a shrimp cocktail, strip sirloin, baked potato, green salad and demitasse at Toots Shor's, tip included, for \$20.00), the cost of medical care is astronomical. A routine delivery by a specialist will set you back \$500

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Our wise pundits and newspaper columnists tell us to wake up and get with it, times have changed and urbanization is the wave of the future. Excuse us if we hold back. Deurbanization seems more sensible. And do you know, not one of those learned urban specialists knew you could stop false labor pains with paregoric and aspirin?

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