

ROGUE'S GALLERY

Lecture to MHSNJ, May 7, 2014 (Slides not included here)

Medical historians like to celebrate our medical heroes and twice a year we in this Society bask in their reflected glory as we sip wine and enjoy dinner in gracious surroundings. At last year's spring meeting, in anticipation of New Jersey's 350th birthday this year, I invited everyone to submit their choices for the top five medical achievements in the state's history. Obviously the survey was seriously flawed and totally unscientific – but there were some interesting findings so here are the results:

SLIDE: In first place were Selman Waksman and Albert Schatz for co-discovering streptomycin. Next was Harrison Martland for demonstrating that radium caused aplastic anemia. Third was Oscar Auerbach who proved the connection between tobacco and lung cancer. In fourth place was Victor Parsonnet's pioneering work with pacemakers and heart surgery and then there was a fifth place tie between Philip Levine who helped discover the Rh factor and blood groups and Irving Selikoff for his work with asbestosis.

Yes, we historians celebrate our medical luminaries but, if truth be told, successful doctors haven't always been iconic – or even honorable. There's always been a parallel universe of quacks, hacks, charlatans, conmen, self-promoters and even an occasional genuine villain. Because in some respects they comprise a more colorful group than the more conventional heroes, this afternoon instead of

discussing New Jersey's Medical Hall of Fame, I'd like to propose a suggest a few candidates for a virtual Hall of Shame. Like at Cooperstown, questions will arise about what qualifies or disqualifies someone for eligibility and I'll let you judge that for yourself. But first let me give a little background.

A 17th visitor to New Jersey described it as a place where quacks were thicker than locusts in Egypt. In truth, the results of treatments prescribed by the orthodox doctors weren't much better than those offered by their rivals – and the side effects of herbal and homeopathic medicines were less odious and usually tasted better.

SLIDE. The eloquent and outspoken Oliver Wendell Holmes fumed that homeopaths were “a mingled mass of perverse ingenuity, of tinsel erudition, of imbecile credulity and of artful misrepresentation.” Dr. Holmes never pulled his punches. So it's no wonder that in 1847, 250 self-styled “regulars” (including Holmes) in order to combat economic competition from the so-called “irregulars” gathered in Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences to form the AMA.

SLIDE. But by 1866 things hadn't changed much in New Jersey. Of some 600 practitioners working in the state, about 20% comprised a *mélange* of homeopaths, eclectics, Thomsonians, clairvoyants, electricians, root doctors and the like.

SLIDE. 21 of the 151 irregulars were women who were described as “of the class known as the progressive bloomer kind, infidels and

spiritualists.” But before I suggest my choices for New Jersey’s Hall of Shame, I can’t resist describing two of my favorite oddballs from beyond our state’s borders:

SLIDE. During the early years of the 20th century, this man, Dr. Ben Reitman was earning a reputation as a “whorehouse physician.” Studs Terkel called him Chicago’s most eminent clap doctor.” Friend and physician for scores of Al Capone’s prostitutes, his clientele also included dope addicts, drifters, hoboes, and hustlers.

Reitman had life-long wanderlust. He left home at age 12 to ride the rails and ran with a rough crowd. His buddies had names like Dopey Liz, Chinatown Blinky, Gloomy George, Hot Tamale Kelly, One Tooth Scully, Olaf the Unwashed, Pessimistic Bernheimer -- a Damon Runyon cast of characters. Ben called them “Knights of the Rails” -- Chicago’s journalists called him “the King of the Hoboes.”

Ben Reitman’s medical education wasn’t exactly conventional. As a teenager he worked as a janitor in a medical laboratory where one of his bosses was so impressed by his diligence that he offered to pay for his tuition. Despite his virtual lack of education, He enrolled in medical school in 1900 and supplemented his income by selling stray dogs and cadavers to his classmates for them to practice on.

Somehow Ben graduated in 1904 and opened an office in the red-light district where his patients included pimps, punks, pickpockets and society’s refuse.

SLIDE. Ben Reitman was an imposing, if shabby figure – tall, self-assured with a black mustache. He wore a cowboy hat, favored a flowing cape and silk tie and flaunted a large walking stick. And when the office routine became too confining, he'd close shop and hit the rails or hop a tramp steamer to Mexico or Manchuria.

(SLIDE) He was attracted to progressive, even radical ideas and considered himself to be a born anarchist – as he once said, “I was always against things – sometimes I was even against my self.” A chronic womanizer, Ben had three wives but his great love was the famous anarchist Emma Goldman whom he assisted as her part-time publicist.

SLIDE. Ben and Emma advocated woman's rights, abortion and birth control AND both believed in free love. But Emma drew the line when it came to Dr. Ben and the couple broke up after nearly a decade on the road – and even spending time in jail together.

SLIDE. By the 1930s Ben's fire had gone out. The world had moved on and in this late picture he's far less dashing – indeed, rather portly and conventional looking. Still, when he died of a heart attack in 1942 at age 63, he was recalled as “one of America's most colorful reformers who had left his mark in the hearts of numerous outcasts -- from the joyladies in Chicago, to the city's hoboes and Bohemian philosophers.”

Although Ben Reitman was eccentric, he hadn't done anything shameful and wasn't mean or dishonest -- but next let me describe one of his contemporaries who was a bone-fide scoundrel.

SLIDE. During the 1920s and 30s, John Romulus Brinkley (1885-1942) from tiny Milford, Kansas was the country's most notorious medical huckster. He bought a medical diploma for \$500 from the Eclectic Medical University which allowed him to get a license in four western states – and for the next two decades this flim-flam man kept two-steps ahead of the law – and the AMA's Morris Fishbein who, like Inspector Javert, pursued him relentlessly. But the more critics that Brinkley attracted, the greater his appeal to the unwashed masses. He made a fortune and sailed the oceans in his fleet of yachts, flew in his own airplanes and entertained celebrity friends in his fabulous homes. None of this troubled his faithful fans who fancied him as “the people's doctor.”

SLIDE. And what was the basis of Doc Brinkley's phenomenal success? Goat testicles! Rejuvenation from injections of monkey testicles had grown popular in Europe based on the claims of Charles Brown-Sequard and Serge Voronoff and Americans also were eager for a boost of testosterone - exactly like today. So starting in 1917 the so-called “Ponce de Leon of Kansas” began reporting that goat glands worked wonders on 27 different ailments from dementia to acne.

SLIDE. Patients would come to his hospital and choose the goat they fancied from his flock. It was castrated on the spot and the implant took only a few minutes. In fact, Doc Brinkley didn't bother to attach the goat gonads but merely dropped them into a slit he made in the recipient's scrotum where he claimed they would "humanize." After some 16,000 testicular implants he modestly claimed a 95% success rate and although the failures included several hundred deaths, these were brushed over – like faulty General Motors ignition switches. Brinkley had trouble keeping up with demands even though the price for glands was high – on average \$750 for goat testes and at least \$5,000 for the human variety which he bought from prisoners on death row. He was a marketing genius and promised to make every man "the ram that am – with every lamb."

SLIDE. Brinkley shamelessly promoted himself on his own radio station which was beamed from his hometown in rural Kansas. And when federal authorities closed it down on the grounds that he was promoting fraud and immorality, Doc set up the world's most powerful radio transmitter just over the Mexican border and continued broadcasting. In fact, Doc Brinkley was the first to use radio advertising to promote his wares as well as whatever patent medicine that others would pay him to air. A popular feature on his radio station was called "The Medical Quiz Box" in which people would call in their ailments. He'd diagnose them sight unseen and then sold the sufferers unnamed drugs at exorbitant prices. Medical advice was accompanied by hillbilly music and soothing homilies and the Milford Miracle Man or Milford Messiah was a sensation.

SLIDE. When government watchdogs got too close for comfort he decided to join them and twice ran for governor of Kansas – narrowly losing when establishment politicians fixed the election against him. Undaunted, he considered a run for President but his grandiosity didn't end there – he likened himself to Jesus – beset and betrayed – and took to evangelism. In one sermon he said, “I'd rather save a soul than be President of the United States – or even king of the world.”

SLIDE. Gullible patients and wealthy patrons submitted testimonials but the more evidence of deaths and disasters was collected, the better he thrived. Inevitably his luck ran out – his hospitals were shut down, his lavish possessions seized and he was forced into bankruptcy. When Doc Brinkley died in 1942, the AMA's Morris Fishbein wrote that “the centuries to come may never produce such blatancy, such fertility of imagination and such ego” but he had to admit that the man was a genius. As William Allen White said, “A little more honesty here, a little more intelligence there...would have made him a really great leader of men.”

(SLIDE) My leading candidate for a New Jersey Hall of Shame is easy – it's Charles Cullen, the former nurse who was the most prolific serial killer in this state's history – probably in the nation's. Cullen confessed to killing up to 40 patients -- beginning in 1988 and continuing for about 16 years at at least five facilities. He didn't keep records and some have estimated that he may have murdered some

400 patients. The “Angel of Death’s” favorite method for dispatching his victims was intravenous digoxin or insulin. Currently Cullen is serving eleven consecutive life sentences – with no hope for parole for nearly 400 years which may be even more than Bernie Madoff’s wait.

(SLIDE) My second choice is Mario Jasclevitch – the famous “Dr. X” who injected curare in the IVs of a rival surgeon’s patients. I couldn’t find a photo of Dr. X but this is the tiny osteopathic hospital in Oradell where he was chief of surgery and allegedly did his dirty work during the 1960s. I say “allegedly” because after months of deliberation a grand jury, which was formed a decade after the actual crimes, failed to find sufficient clear and convincing evidence to convict him. But Dr. X lost his license and returned to his native Argentina where he died several years later – and as a result of the scandal, River Dell Hospital went out of business and was torn down,

SLIDE. Just a few miles from here, remnants of Skillman Village for Epileptics still stand and appears to be haunted by its past. You may recall that a few years ago I discussed Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen whom I’ve dubbed “Dr. Evil.” He worked as a psychiatrist at Skillman for only about a year in 1911 and then for another two years at Trenton State – and he’s my candidate number three.

(SLIDE) Here Katzen-Ellenbogen appears in a group photo of those who attended the famous 1907 conference at Clark University in Worcester, Mass. where the world’s leading psychiatrists and

psychologists gathered. You can recognize Freud and Jung in the front row and the tall bearded fellow in the center (just to Freud's right) is Clark's President G. Stanley Hall. Immediately behind him – the young man with a dark mustache – is Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen, standing among the luminaries like Woody Allen's Zelig.

Descended from a long line of Polish rabbis, while studying in Leipzig he met a wealthy American girl and converted to her Catholicism. Then they married and in 1905 moved to Boston where her father was a supreme court justice. At the time of this photo, he was 23 years old, had just received his PhD from Leipzig and was working as an alienist in nearby Danvers. He'd soon publish some articles on experimental psychology, became active in eugenics organizations and was a lecturer at Harvard Medical School. He was a young man on the rise.

Then, for obscure reasons, in 1911 he took a rather minor job at Skillman Village, but he didn't impress the Medical Director and his one year contract wasn't renewed. He landed another position at Trenton State, but then in 1914, he abandoned wife and child and returned to Europe. From there the trail gets murkier and the plot more sinister.

Katzen-Ellenbogen later claimed to have worked for the Red Cross in Russia for about two years and then in 1917 there was a sighting in The Hague where he ingratiated himself with wealthy widows and borrowed money heavily. For the next two decades he wandered

throughout Europe and compiled a shameful record of bigamy, extortion, forgery and theft. He was arrested several times and his behavior was so bad that in 1927 Leipzig rescinded his doctorate. When World War II began, he was sent to Buchenwald – presumably because of his Jewish roots – and there things got even worse.

SLIDE. This is a telling photograph. For three years in the camp he got special privileges – he was put in charge of hospital admissions and assisted in some of the notorious human experiments that were performed at Buchenwald. Notice that he's wearing a tie and civilian clothes and the armband indicates that he was a prisoner medic. Also, he appears well fed at a time when most prisoners looked like scarecrows in pajamas – and as a zealous eugenicist, he was particularly cruel to French prisoners whom he considered to be genetically inferior.

SLIDE. After the war, at an American military trial held at Dachau, K-E was tried as a Nazi collaborator. He was accused of being responsible either directly or indirectly for the deaths of more than a thousand prisoners – sometimes personally injecting them with phenol. But there were no survivors to testify and the erudite professor ran rings around the prosecutors – he spoke perfect English, was self-confident and had an answer for everything.

SLIDE. Transcripts from the trial indicate that the Army's lawyers knew nothing about his criminal record between the wars, but they sensed that the so-called psychopathologist was a psychopath. He

received a life sentence and after three years died of heart failure in a US Army prison. Not exactly the kind of story you'd expect about a Jewish-born, naturalized American citizen and Harvard professor -- but evil enough to qualify him for our medical Hall of Shame – even though his time in New Jersey was very limited.

So we have The Angel of Death, Dr. X and Dr. Evil all fairly obvious choices. However, the next two candidates are more challenging.

SLIDE. During the limited time that Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen worked at the New Jersey State Hospital in Trenton, the medical director there was Henry Aloysius Cotton. He wasn't necessarily a villain, but in the opinion of his biographer (Andrew Scull) was a misguided megalomaniac.

Dr. Cotton was appointed superintendent in 1905 while only 30 years old. Some 15 years later, on January 11, 1921, he spoke right here in Princeton to a packed house of about 400 people – and in the first of four public lectures at his alma mater, he triumphantly announced a historic breakthrough in understanding the cause of mental disease. It was based on five years of work in Trenton which, according to Dr. Cotton, proved that mental disorders were not due to faulty genes like the eugenicists believed, nor to childhood traumas and suppressed emotions as suggested by Freudians. No, the cause was much simpler – it was biologic – the result of seepage into the blood stream of toxins from occult low-grade infections which then caused mischief

upstream in the brain. The challenge was to find the offending pocket of pus -- and then cut it out.

SLIDE. The most obvious source of infection was the mouth so Dr. Cotton began by removing teeth -- and then tonsils -- even if there were no obvious signs of disease. And if that didn't do the job, he probed deeper and removed presumably infected internal organs -- gall bladders, spleens, thyroids. If madness was accompanied by constipation, out came the colon -- the entire colon! In 1919 alone Dr. Cotton ordered 6000 dental extractions and more than 500 tonsillectomies. That same year 79 colons were removed with an astonishingly high mortality -- between 30 and 40% -- but he said that these were desperate end-stage cases -- it was their last chance.

Dr. Cotton reported amazing results -- an 85% cure rate of psychosis; length of asylum stay reduced from 10 to 3 months. So many wealthy people flocked to Trenton to sacrifice their teeth, tonsils and organs that a private hospital was built to meet the demand. Although many patients were unwilling, their families insisted that it was for their own good -- not only to prevent insanity but to correct other abnormalities such as chronic masturbation. Some psychiatrists feared that their new specialty would be reduced to a subdivision of surgery or dentistry.

Henry Cotton was a superb self-promoter and although most authorities were skeptical, for years no one challenged his results. But inevitably there were investigations and when his results couldn't

be replicated elsewhere, his crusade against pus only became more radical. Nearly every patient left Trenton edentulous, and he must have been a true believer because just before two of Cotton's sons entered Princeton, he had all of their teeth extracted as prophylaxis against God knows what – apparently it didn't work so well because years later both boys committed suicide.

Tonsillectomies have been performed for thousands of years, but its popularity had waxed and waned. Now Henry Cotton's work introduced great enthusiasm for the procedure which persisted long after his theories were discredited. The debacle only ended in 1933 when Dr. Cotton succumbed to a sudden heart attack, but by then hundreds had died and thousands more were maimed.

After the Princeton lectures, a reporter from The New York Times wrote, "At the State Hospital in Trenton, under the brilliant leadership of its medical director Henry Cotton, there is on foot the most searching, aggressive and profound scientific investigation that has as yet been made in the whole field of mental and nervous disorders....There is high hope for the future."

At the height of his fame, the President of the Medical Society of New Jersey said of Dr. Cotton that future generations "will rise up and call him blessed." And consider this – nearly every one of you of a certain age had your own tonsils removed as children -- so perhaps you, too, should rise up and bless Henry Cotton. Could it be that your tonsils were removed NOT to prevent recurrent sore throats or Rheumatic

Fever or nephritis, but as prophylaxis against insanity – or even masturbation?

SLIDE. My last candidate for our Hall of Shame also had an unconventional approach. DINSHAH GHADIALI was born in Bombay to a family of Zoroastrians. He claimed to have been a child prodigy and as he grew older developed skills as an inventor, linguist, mystic, yogi, musician, actor and pioneer aviator. He claimed to have a dozen doctorates including in engineering, law, chiropractic, electrohydrotherapy and yes, one in medicine – although he never produced a diploma. Honorary titles included President of the All Cults Medical Association and President of the American Anti-Vivisection Society.

Dinshah Ghadiali espoused a philosophy of reverence for life and championed the right of freedom of choice. He claimed friendship with Mahatma Gandhi and Thomas Edison. When he arrived in Hillsdale, New Jersey in 1911, he was dissatisfied with a culture which emphasized sports, dating and learning by rote rather than teaching ethics and morality -- so he schooled his own children. He warned against the evils of tobacco and alcohol and was a leading vegetarian.

SLIDE. Dinshah patented many inventions. The most controversial and lucrative was based on the therapeutic properties of visible light and color -- what he called “spectrochrome therapy.” He put pure water into various colored glass bottles, exposed them to light from a 1000 watt bulb which presumably charged the water and brought out

the therapeutic properties. He claimed that the human body is responsive to four “color wave potencies” and if these get out of balance, disease results.

SLIDE. Treatment consisted of restoring natural balance by administering the lacking color or reducing those that were too brilliant. In his system green light was a pituitary stimulant, germicide and muscle builder; red was a liver energizer and hemoglobin builder; blue a vitality booster; Lemon a bone builder; Scarlet a genital excitant, etc. He provided a numbered chart which showed disciples where to shine the light onto bare skin. Is that any stranger than Galen’s theory of humoral balance or of acupuncture mapping? Dinshah sold more than 11,000 of his visible spectrum color projectors” grossing more than one million dollars.

SLIDE. Dinshah established an Institute in Malaga, NJ to promote his ideas and sell his projectors. For 40 years he battled the AMA, the FDA and the US Post Office for fraudulent advertising and illegal use of the mail. In 1925 he was convicted of violating the Mann Act, having transported his 19 year old assistant across state lines for non-professional services. After a gun-battle with police in Oregon, he spent nearly two years in a Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta but that didn’t prevent him from running for Governor of New Jersey in 1925 – running from jail on a platform in which he asserted that he would promise nothing! He received more than 1000 votes. And after his jail sentence was commuted by President Coolidge, he went right back to selling his devices.

SLIDE. When Dinshah Ghadiali died in 1966, his children continued to run the Dinshah Health Society in Malaga (Gloucester County.) Their logo is “Let Their Be Light” and even today you can go to their website and become a member for three dollars a year -- or you can buy a spectrochrome projector.

SLIDE. So my question to you all is were Henry Cotton and/or Dinshah Ghadiali sufficiently bad actors to merit a place in a New Jersey Medical Hall of Shame?
Let's discuss it over wine and cheese.