

Letters to the Editor

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIET AND ARTERIOSCLEROSIS

Dear Sir:

In a recent Editorial of your JOURNAL (5:674, 1957), Dr. William Dock raises the question: "How will the medical historian of the year 2207 regard the reaction of some segments of the medical profession in the last half century to the vast and concordant evidence for the dietary basis of atherosclerosis?"

Belonging to the more skeptical "segment," I freely admit that there are many still controversial data published in the literature which indicate that dietary factors may possibly modify the course of atherosclerosis. In spite of the vast literature on this problem, however, no evidence has yet been provided which *proves* that human atherosclerosis is produced by the consumption of fat or, particularly, butter fat, as suggested in the Editorial by Dr. Dock. It seems to be logical, therefore, that a large segment of investigators is waiting for more conclusive evidences before accepting any causal connection between diet and atherosclerosis. We just have to take our chances with the historian of the year 2207! But did Dr. Dock consider what Clio's judgment may be of physicians who, not so long ago, accepted as truth the theory based on statistical coincidence, that malaria was produced by "malaria," i.e., by "bad air" or that excessive sugar consumption is responsible for diabetes?

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COMMENT BY DR. DOCK

Dear Sir:

The doctors who believed malaria was due to "vapors" made fun of the work of Laveran, and of those who worked out the cycle of malarial plasmodia in crows and canaries, just as those who believe arteriosclerosis is due to degeneration make fun of experiments on chicks, rabbits, dogs or monkeys. In these young animals dietary manipulation, and dietary manipulation alone, raises blood cholesterol (as does dietary manipulation in man) and produces atherosclerosis, not seen in controls or much older normal animals. In rats, rabbits, chicks and monkeys, butter fat does raise blood cholesterol and in rats causes coronary disease and myocardial infarction not seen in controls on corn oil. Since people who use no butter fat, in America, Asia and Africa, are remarkably free of atherosclerosis, and have blood cholesterol levels under 180 mg/100 ml it seems to me that those who are skeptical share the mental attitude of those who rejected the avian work in malaria, or Harvey's work on the circulation. Those who reject animal evidence concordant with clinical experience should be rabid antivivisectionists, for animals should not be used if the facts they reveal do not apply to man.

The point I tried to make was that since 1915 the evidence that diet rich in animal fat was the *sine qua non* for atherosclerosis has been far more compelling than evidence for the circulation was in 1628 or even 1678.

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