



2006

Historical Clinicopathological Conference

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A Case of "Racial Characteristics"



This patient was one of the most admired Americans of his time. Born a slave, he was the successor of Frederick Douglass as leader and spokesman for black America in the aftermath of the Civil War...

November 1, 1915

COMPLAINT

Headache, sleeplessness, fatigue and dyspnoea on climbing stairs. Palpitation, slight cough, occasional indigestion, loss of weight, loss of appetite, failing vision.

FAMILY HISTORY

Nothing known of father. Mother died 40 years ago, probably of dropsy. Patient has one older brother who is in only fair health. One sister died this year of apoplexy.

PAST HISTORY

About 20 years ago patient had a bad attack of malaria, lasting two or three weeks. He has always been troubled with dyspepsia. No sore throat or rheumatism. No other illnesses. Bowels are usually regular.

PRESENT ILLNESS:

Up to one year ago patient was quite well except for occasional headaches, which he called bilious headaches. He began to feel cold feet. In February, he was acutely ill with gastro-intestinal upset...

PHYSICAL EXAMINATION:

Patient is a middle-aged man. He lies in bed rather restless, moving constantly. Head: Temporal arteries are dilated, tortuous and non-compressible. Eyes: Pupils are equal and regular; react promptly to light. Movements normal. Eyeballs prominent.

Nov. 2, 1915 (Dr. Cohn)

Two weeks ago patient had palpitation. He gets tired more quickly now, especially if he is excited. He does not do a day's work now, formerly worked from nine to five and in the evening. He has never had any pain in the chest or cough.

Laboratory Studies:

Wassermann reported negative (Dr. Jagle).

Notes

- 1 - The patient had chronic indigestion, particularly when traveling, which he treated with Bell's Papayan tablets... 2 - Additional Past History: In 1911, the patient was beaten while visiting the tenderloin section of New York City... 3 - Social History: The patient was married three times... 4 - The patient was African-American, variously described as having "medium brown skin of a mulatto... 5 - In his prime, the patient was a renown orator with the "power to sway crowds and move men to his purposes..."

Table 1: Urea, Sodium Chloride, Phthalein data. Table 2: Microscopic characteristics, Specific Gravity, Reaction, Quant. Sugar, Albumin, Sediment data.

2006 Guest Participants



Jackson T. Wright Jr., MD, PhD, FACP, is professor of medicine and program director of the general clinical research center at Case Western Reserve University. He is also director of the clinical hypertension program at Case/University Hospitals of Cleveland.



W. Fitzhugh Brundage, PhD, is the William B. Umstead Professor of History at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. His general research interests are American history—post Civil War—with particular focus on the American South.

Final diagnosis