

STRUCTURE

In July, 1966 a Section of Neurology was established in the long-standing Department of Psychiatry and Neurology. At this time there was only a neurology consulting service at the University Hospital (UNH). However, there was an active Neurology Service at the Veterans Administration Hospital, Omaha (VAH); between May 1, 1965 and June 31, 1966 it had a total of 335 admissions.

On July 1, 1967 a Department of Neurology was, with the approval of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, formally established. Walter J. Friedlander, M.D. was selected to be chairman.

One of the major tasks was to obtain approval from the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology for a residency program. The application indicated that the neurology program would include not only UNH, but also VAH. Approval was granted on May 29, 1968.

Neurology clinics were established at West Nebraska General Hospital, Scottsbluff and at Good Samaritan Hospital, Kearney. A neurologist from the Department of Neurology attended each for a day every month. Outpatients as well as inpatients were seen in consultation and, where appropriate, recommendations were made to transfer the patient to UNH. The purpose of these visits was: one, to render neurological services to patients and their physicians in light of the fact that there were no neurologists at that time west of Omaha, and, two, to introduce these physicians to the neurological services rendered at UNH. This was the first, or at least among the first such out-state University of Nebraska College of Medicine (UNMC) regularly scheduled clinics. These neurology clinics continued through 1973.

One of the major difficulties faced by referring private patients to UNH was that, at that time, the hospital accommodations consisted entirely of large open wards with beds separated only by a hanging sheet. These paying patients were frequently reluctant to be admitted under such conditions. Again, this was the first, or at least among the first, time this category of patients was admitted to UNH. This problem was obviated when the new hospital opened in 1969-1970.

In October, 1970, Agapito Lorenzo, M.D. was appointed head of the VAH's Neurology Service; this was a notable event because the VAH was an important part of the new neurology residency training program. Dr. Lorenzo held this position until he stepped down in July, 1996.

In February, 1971, discussions began about forming a single, combined Department of Neurology including both Creighton University College of Medicine and UNMC. This was done under the auspices of the newly established Creighton-Nebraska Universities Health Foundation. At this time, Creighton's neurology was within their Department of Psychiatry and Neurology; they were without a neurology residency program although some of their students took a neurology elective at VAH. The purposes of this were: one, to appreciably increase the number of patients available for the neurology residency program, and, two to prevent a competition between the two schools. This would have resulted, at that time, if Creighton desired to establish its own separate residency program. It was of concern that one approved residency program, which was not overly blessed with "teaching material," would be put at considerable risk if a second program was begun that would draw patients from the same areas.

On June 29, 1971, UNMC's Department of Neurology presented to the deans of both schools "A Proposal for a Joint Training Program." UNMC's original idea was to establish a single, joint department, including, of course, a joint residency program. However, at the suggestion of Creighton, this concept was altered so that only a joint residency program would be established with the proviso that at some future time the idea of a joint department would be considered. After much discussion and many meetings, the governing bodies of both schools approved the creation of a joint residency program in April, 1972. Because UNH had an existing residency program, it was decided to make the chairman of UNMC's Department of Neurology, who was also director of their residency program, director of the new joint residency. The creation of the joint program which involved two unrelated medical schools was the first time this was done here and, it was suggested, the first time such an arrangement was realized anywhere in the United States. Having established this precedent, it was subsequently adopted by the Department of Dermatology and the Department of Orthopedics.

In July, 1972 the AMA Council for Graduate Medical Education was informed of these changes in the program and they accepted the arrangements. The hospitals now involved in the new teaching program were: St Joseph Hospital (Creighton's teaching hospital at that time), University Hospital, Veterans Administration Hospital, and Bishop Clarkson Hospital. However, in September, 1975 Clarkson's part in the program was discontinued because of an "increasing work load at the...[three other hospitals] and a cutting back on UNH's number of residents [for financial reasons]."

On June 30, 1973, Dr. Friedlander stepped down as chairman of UNMC's Neurology Department and director of the joint residency program; Miles Skultety, M.D., chairman of UNMC's Department of Neurosurgery was made acting chairman of Neurology.

In the winter of 1974, Donald Bennett, M.D. was selected to be chairman of the UNMC's Department of Neurology and director of the joint residency program. With Dr. Bennett's arrival, Creighton and UNMC established a single Department of Neurology, an idea which had been discussed in the original planning that resulted in the joint residency program. Dr. Bennett assumed the position of chairman both at UNMC and Creighton.

Five years later, August 27, 1978, directors of the Creighton- Nebraska Universities Health Foundation evaluated the joint residency training program. Although several physicians in private practice in Omaha advised closing the program because of the difficulty in getting residents and there not being a sufficient number of patients, the deans of the two schools concluded that the program should be continued and, in fact, commended Dr. Bennett for his work.

In June, 1986, Dr. Bennett stepped down as chairman and Ronald Pfeiffer, M.D. was appointed acting chairman. Shortly after this UNMC's Department of Neurology became a section in the Department of Medicine. Dr. Pfeiffer was head of the neurology section until he stepped down in 1993; following this Rifaat Bashir, M.D. headed the section until he resigned in July 1999. Lyal Leibrock, M.D. chief of the neurosurgical section became acting chief of the neurology section.

Creighton established its own Department of Neurology in September, 1989 with the appointment of John Bertoni, M.D.. This dissolved the joint department, but not the joint residency program. Robert Baker, M.D., a professor at UNMC, became director of the residency program. Despite all these changes, the joint residency has continued.

At about the time Dr. Lorenzo stepped down as chief of VAH's neurology section, their neurology section was closed, and neurology at VAH became only a consultative service.

The latest major event occurred in April, 2001 when, with the appointment of Pierre Fayad, M.D. as chairman of neurology at UNMC. neurology was resurrected as the Department of Neurological Sciences.

Teaching, Research, and Grants

When the Department was originally established, a required student clerkship of one month was begun; it included UNH and VAH. Unfortunately, this was discontinued at about the time neurology became a section in medicine although there is still an elective in neurology.

The first clinical research project began in 1969. It was one of the early evaluations of L-DOPA in the treatment of Parkinson's disease.

From October, 1972 until June, 1980 the National Institute of Neurological Diseases supported the Clinical Neurological Information Center's publication of Concise Clinical Neurology Review which was an every-other-week review of neurological articles in about 850 medical journals. Walter Friedlander was editor. Ultimately this had a world-wide subscription list including individuals and institutions in Russia and China. The contract over this eight year period amounted to just under \$1,000,000.

During Dr. Pfeiffer's tenure at UNMC he established a special clinic for patients with involuntary movements including, of course, those with Parkinson's disease. He did this with the assistance of grants from a number of pharmaceutical companies.

During the time that Dr. Bashir was a member of the neurology faculty at UNMC he had a special clinic for patients with multiple sclerosis which was supported by the MS Society and grants from pharmaceutical companies.

The main functions of the Neurology Department have been patient service and teaching of students and residents. Some clinical research has been done and papers published, but this has not been the faculty's forte. The major and persisting problems that the department has had is in attracting patients and residents, and recruiting as well as retaining faculty. The down grading of Neurology from a department to a section within the Department of Medicine was detrimental to all aspects of UNMC's neurology and aggravated its various problems. It is anticipated that with the renewal of department status, the increased support by Nebraska Health Services and the presence of a new energetic and creative chairman, the future of neurology at UNMC will be bright.

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