

**TAKING THE PULSE.**

In this short article, we shall endeavour to give some brief indications as to the correct method of performing what is commonly known as “ taking the pulse.” In the first place, the term itself should be discarded as the pulse is not actually taken, it is merely noted. Thus in future we shall refer to the procedure as “ noting the pulse.”

To note a pulse correctly, then, the student must observe and calculate accurately. We have on several occasions observed students informing their chiefs that the patient’s pulse-rate was “ about seventy-two,” when actually it was seventy, or, in some rare cases, even as low as sixty-eight. These erroneous answers are due either to atrocious observation or to abominable calculation, or both.

It is a well-known physiological phenomenon that any nervous disturbance profoundly alters the pulse-rate, and it is, therefore, absolutely essential that the patient be placed at perfect ease. Students must remember that to do this it is not essential to address patients in endearing and motherly terms, or to make clucking noises. All that is required is that the student approach the patient quietly but firmly, with such dignity as is befitting his chosen profession, and yet with perfect “ bonhomie ” and “ joie de vivre.”

He stands on the patient’s right-hand side, with the feet slightly apart, and with the toes pointing outwards or slightly inwards, according to their individual peculiarities. The student then lightly places the tips of the fore-, middle-, ring- and little fingers of his right hand along the radial side of the volar aspect of the distal portion of the patient’s right forearm immediately proximal to the thenar eminence. The student’s fingers should be placed in a row, and not on top of one another. If this procedure is performed correctly, the pulsation of the radial artery will easily be felt in thin, middling, and fat subjects.

The student then borrows a watch and holds it in his left hand in such a way that the dials of both watch and observer face each other. He then notes the number of pulsations occurring in thirty seconds by means of the following method:—

As soon as the second hand of the watch reaches the sixty mark the student calls out, “ Nought.” At the first beat occurring after this, he calls out, “ One,” at the second beat, “ Two,” at the third, “ Three,” and so on until the thirty mark is reached. Students in the fifth year of study are allowed to commence counting when the second hand reaches the fifteen mark, but they must remember that thirty seconds will have elapsed when the forty-five mark is reached. The readings thus observed are jotted down in the student’s note-book. They should appear approximately as follows:—

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, etc.

(N.B.—The above readings are merely theoretical, and not the actual readings observed in any one particular patient.)

The highest number, which is also usually the last, is then taken to represent the number of pulsations occurring in thirty seconds.

The student may use only one eye to time the thirty seconds, and with the other he may look out of the window and gaze on the daisies growing in the hospital garden, or he may even attempt to decide whether these beautiful flowers are monocotyledons or platyhelminths. It is only by doing this that he will ever really appreciate the value of his year’s training in botany.

The readings taken, the calculation has yet to be made. The year’s physics course greatly facilitates this. The following formula is used:—

$$\frac{\text{Number of pulsations in thirty secs.}}{30} \times \frac{60}{1} \times \frac{5}{2} \times \frac{1}{2.5}$$

The answer will be in beats per minute. The student need not concern himself with the theory of the formula.

The final result is then recorded neatly and in ink on the patient's bed-letter. The preliminary calculations need not appear with it.

The houseman may then confidently be asked to sign the student's daily-attendance D.P. card.

W.L.

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## Correspondence.

The Editor,

" The Leech."

Sir,—Though not wishing to be querulous, I must emphasize a grievance which the Medical Students have: We are frequently not notified by the authorities of matters which are of interest to us.

To quote a few examples: We were not invited to attend the opening of the new Operating Theatres Block, nor of the Bok Street Clinic; we were not notified of the Flag Hoisting Ceremony at Milner Park, a function which many of us would have made a point of attending; an examination in English or Afrikaans Essay has to be passed by us, but no notice was given at the Medical School of the date of the examination conducted early this year.

In these respects we feel that we have not received the consideration to which we are entitled.

One measure I should strongly urge, that the authorities be approached and be requested to post at the Medical School all notices affecting us, whether they be posted at Milner Park or not.

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