

## SALESMANSHIP AND THE DOCTOR

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Although we are constantly urged by our national and state medical organizations to engage in and devote more effort to the bettering of medicine's public relations, this is a field of promotion and salesmanship that most physicians find distasteful. While a few of us do possess the talent, the majority of us were not cut out of salesman cloth.

A slightly different aspect of salesmanship is that of a more personal nature, by which we build our practices and increase our earning capacity. A certain amount of this type of salesmanship is essential to success in any field, and medicine is no exception.

When medical salesmanship exceeds a certain point, when, unintentionally or otherwise, it is pushed too far by a practicing physician, it moves vaguely into the realm of ethics. The critical eyes of fellow practitioners are usually the first to spot an excess of medical salesmanship; the uncritical eyes of patients, unfortunately, are usually the last to discover it. Unfortunately, too, the salesman's patients and their families are those most victimized, not only financially (actually in some cases, not at all financially) but medically, by submitting to procedures that sometimes worsen their plight and occasionally lead to disaster.

Almost a quarter of a century ago an elderly and kindly, accomplished general surgeon, then only a few years into his retirement, was the first to mention medical salesmanship to us. He had turned over a fine surgical practice to his younger associate of a few years. In commenting on a remark that the younger man seemed exceedingly busy and was building an even greater surgical practice, he smiled philosophically and, a bit wryly, replied, "Yes, he's operating on all those old hernias, hemorrhoids, fibroids and cystoceles that I nursed along all these years. He's a better salesman than I ever was."

Every year in every hospital where surgery is done there are at least a half-dozen operative deaths in elective surgical cases. Some of these occur dramatically under anesthesia or in the recovery rooms. Some occur as the result of an unexpected or even unavoidable postoperative complication. Some result from an existing complication missed by a hurried preoperative workup. Many of these patients might still be alive, "nursing" their preexisting, non urgent pathology, had they not become victims of over enthusiastic medical salesmanship.

Medical salesmanship is often a matter of personality, of individual drive, ambition and attitude. When it is engaged in unthinkingly or too vigorously, it is not entirely innocuous.