

Oration from 1898

Oration Title:

Serum Therapy

Orator:

O. H. Everett, M.D.

Abstract of Oration:

Dr. Everett begins his talk by explaining why the topic of serum therapy is an appropriate, relevant, and pressing topic. As he says, diphtheria toxin has been in use only since 1893, and the research and development of serum therapy are still in progress. Therefore, Everett believes his colleagues must become educated and updated on this innovative medical treatment. Continuing, the doctor lists some of the theories on how exactly a bacterium causes disease. So far it is known that bacteria multiply in the animal body and produce toxins, but the chemical composition of these toxins has not been identified. After briefly describing disease immunity, Everett goes on to discuss the efforts made to counter these toxins. He describes immunity trials in animals. From these he explains the current, developing theories about antitoxins which are produced by the infected individual's cells.

With this groundwork in place, Dr. Everett continues with a detailed description of the process by which an effective diphtheria antitoxin serum was prepared by immunizing horses and collecting the serum, called Behring's serum, from their blood. To stress the incredible benefit of this serum, the doctor gives statistics from doctors and hospitals in the state that show marked decreases in diphtheral deaths, such as from 43 percent down to 12.5 percent mortality. He cites similar results from serum use in tetanus cases, though not quite as successful as those of diphtheria. Everett then talks about trials of serum therapy in other bacterial diseases such as tuberculosis, streptococcus, and syphilis. He describes the reliability of using tuberculin to diagnose tuberculosis as being about 80 percent. Tuberculosis, Everett says, has proven a more difficult subject for serum therapy, but he points out that much progress has been made and continues. He again gives success rate statistics when talking about serum therapy with streptococcus.

Dr. Everett's enthusiasm for the innovative field of serum therapy is evident in his oration. He gives encouraging statistics and looks excitedly to the future with grand predictions, thus inspiring his audience to participate in this new medical technology.