

## Sydney Probus Six Minute Talk: 1 Jun 10 Ray Hyslop

Vice President, fellow members, this morning I want you to go back 75 years. It is 1935 about the average date of birth of us here. We are going to look at the state of medicine at that time.

If a married couple could not conceive then apart from blowing some gas through the woman's Fallopian Tubes there was nothing scientifically proven to help. If the man had no sperms or they were present but dead, then he was condemned to firing blanks for the rest of his life.

Pregnancy was 60 times more dangerous for the woman than it is now. She had a 1 in 200 chance of dying. There was no specific treatment for eclampsia or kidney fits and both haemorrhage and infection were ever present problems. Women having their first baby were often in labour for three or four days and sometimes five. The labour was eventually completed by dexterous vaginal manipulations and forceps delivery performed by her doctor. I am sure I am not the only person here delivered in that manner. Caesarean sections were performed infrequently.

Those of us here are one of the 15 babes out of 16 born who survived the pregnancy, labour and neonatal period as it then was 8 to 9 times more dangerous to be born than now. Having survived we as growing children were then exposed to those great childhood scourges of whooping cough, diphtheria and scarlet fever as there was no immunization. A streptococcal throat infection could lead to Bright's disease or nephritis and in other cases rheumatic fever. If the child did not die during the acute phase of the fever then he was often left with damaged heart valves. The valves could either leak badly or be stenosed so that blood could not flow through adequately. In both cases there was increasing heart failure leading to an inevitable premature and miserable death. Infection was an ever present worry as there were no antibiotics. In 1926 my paternal grandfather died at the ripe old age of 40 from septicaemia following tonsillitis. Such deaths were still common in 1935. Surgery was skilled but limited by two factors. Firstly, any abdominal procedure ran the risk of peritonitis and secondly, there was only rag and bottle anaesthesia with ether or chloroform. I am sure many of you experienced the terror that I did as that mask was clamped over your face to put you off to sleep to have your tonsils removed.

Fractures could only be treated by closed reduction and the application of plaster of Paris. If you broke your leg it was in plaster for three months. A fractured thigh or hip meant lying in bed with the leg in the air in traction for six months. For people of our age that was often a death warrant as they developed hypostatic pneumonia because of their inability to aerate their lungs adequately.

Apart from aspirin, there were very few drugs of any use. Digitalis was the only effective drug for cardiac problems and helped failing hearts function more effectively. However, it was often dispensed as a tincture and not in scientifically accurate tablets.

Should you stray and sow wild oats there was always the chance of catching a dose of the clap or worse the pox. There is an old saying, an hour with Bacchus, the night with Venus lead to ten years with Mercury as it was injected in an attempt to eradicate the syphilitic spirochaete from your body.

So how come we are here today. Well firstly, we have to thank our parents for endowing us with good genes. Secondly, we were lucky to escape or strong enough to overcome serious infections. Finally, whilst there is good evidence that regular indulgence in wine is beneficial, it is perhaps not just the wine but our life style that has been most important. I thank for your attention.