

Harold G. Wolff

May 26, 1898 — February 21, 1962

Dr. Harold G. Wolff, Anne Parrish Titzel Professor of Medicine (Neurology) at Cornell University Medical College and Attending Physician and Psychiatrist at the New York Hospital, died February 21, 1962, at the age of 63. Death occurred at the Clinical Center of the National Institutes of Health; he had been a patient there since suffering a cerebral thrombosis one week previously while attending a scientific meeting in Washington, D.C. He is survived by his widow, Isabel Bishop Wolff, and by his son, Remson N. Wolff.

Dr. Wolff was born in New York City, May 26, 1898, and was the only son of Louis and Emma Wolff. He was a graduate of the College of the City of New York in 1918 and of Harvard Medical School in 1923. He had been associated with the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center since its establishment in 1932, serving as head of the Neurological Service throughout that period. Dr. Wolff was also director of the Study Program in Human Health and the Ecology of Man at that Medical Center, and was consultant in neurology to the Manhattan Veterans Administration Hospital and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Veterans Administration Hospital.

Following his graduation from medical college, Dr. Wolff was associated with the Cornell Clinic Department of Neurology and Bellevue Hospital 1923-1926, and with Harvard Medical College and Boston City Hospital 1926-1928. He was assistant in the Department of Psychiatry, John Hopkins Hospital, 1929-1931. After a year of foreign study, including work with the eminent Russian physiologist, Pavlov, he joined the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, where he remained for the duration of his career.

Dr. Wolff was a leading authority on headache and on the circulation of the brain, an outstanding contributor to the understanding of the nature of pain, and an author of more than five hundred scientific papers and fourteen books in the field of neurology and neurological diseases.

He was perhaps best known for his studies of the participation of the central nervous system in human disease. His investigations of "life stress and bodily disease" profoundly influenced the modern concept of the nature of such illnesses as peptic ulcer, high blood pressure, and migraine headache. It has been said of him that "during thirty-five years of investigation he filled in the major outlines of the process by which a disturbance of the relation of a man to his fellow man may lead ultimately to the development of irreversible tissue damage and to death."

Early in his career, at a time when he was studying the role of the vessels of the head in headache, he developed the theory that the changes in the function of these vessels, which he found to be the primary source of the pain, were the result of disturbances originated in the brain as a part of the reaction of the headache sufferer to his "life situation." From that time forward he conducted a series of experimental investigations into the reactions of men to their life situations and the effect of these on the functions of various internal organs. Out of these investigations he developed the concept of the "adaptive reaction pattern," demonstrating that man's reaction to his environment can appreciably influence the course of disease. Ultimately he concluded that there is no special category of disease that is "psychosomatic" but that all human illness is influenced by adaptive reaction patterns initiated in the higher centers of the brain.

In his later years Dr. Wolff and his colleagues turned to the study of "life stress" and the effect of social and cultural patterns upon health. They produced evidence suggesting that people whose life situations are threatening, demanding, and productive of conflict have illnesses of many types. As an incident in this aspect of his studies Dr. Wolff was a leader among the group of scientists who investigated the methods of interrogation and indoctrination used by the Communist state police, the so-called "brain washing" phenomenon.

Within the past year his studies of a new medication for the prevention of headache helped clarify further the nature of head pain. In perhaps his most brilliant recent contribution, he discovered a substance, named "Neurokinin," apparently liberated at nerve endings, which is associated with pain and inflammation.

Dr. Wolff was, at the time of his death, president of the Human Ecology Fund, editor-in-chief of the *Archives of Neurology*, editor for diseases of the nervous system in the Cecil Loeb textbook of medicine, consultant in research and development to the Department of Defense, and a member of numerous other research committees. During 1960-1961, he was president of the American Neurological Association.

He was a member of the Association of American Physicians, the American Society for Clinical Investigation, the American Physiological Society, the American College of Physicians, the American Neurological Association, the Century Association, and the Harvard Club.

Dr. Wolff was the recipient of many awards, including the Louis Livingston Seaman Award of the Association of Military Surgeons in 1960; an Oxford (England) Honorary Lectureship at the Symposium on Mental Health in 1959; and many other distinctions. He was president in 1942-1943 and again in 1949-1950 of the Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Disease and editor of the "Proceedings on Pain."

To his colleagues and students at the New York Hospital Harold Wolff will be remembered as a dedicated teacher, a brilliant clinician, a professional investigator, and a stimulating friend. His death is recorded with deep regret.

Helen Goodell, Lawrence E. Hinkle, Jr., E. Hugh Luckey