Lobar Pneumonia Treated by Musgrave Park Physicians

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Medical History

Lobar pneumonia treated by Musgrave Park physicians

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SUMMARY

In the decade 1935-45 the treatment of lobar pneumonia in the developed and warring world underwent a series of evolutions—anti-sera, specific anti-sera, refinement of sulpha drugs, sulpha and anti-sera, the introduction of penicillin for bacteriology, then ophthalmology, and then for penicillin-sensitive bacterial infections such as lobar pneumonia with its many Cooper types of Streptococcus pneumoniae. Penicillin for civilian use was essentially banned in World War II, a ban that early in 1941 two Musgrave Park physicians tried to circumvent. Strict secrecy on the details of penicillin production was enforced. The treatment option chosen by the Musgrave Park physicians in 1941, and the non-availability of penicillin led to sequelae affecting the post-Belfast careers of both patient and physicians.

KEY WORDS: Sera, Sulpha, Penicillin

INTRODUCTION

At the start of his 1944 Campbell Oration, the newly knighted Alexander Fleming (Figure 1) mentioned his 40-year collaboration and mentorship with Sir Almroth Wright. He thanked his friend, housemate and long-time collaborator Victor Douglas Allison, Queen’s MB, later DSc. Allison had been the JC White Lecturer in Bacteriology, Queen’s University. After working with Wright and Fleming, as a Beit Memorial Research Fellow, he became a Senior Consulting Pathologist to Belfast City Hospital and the Northern Ireland Hospitals. Fleming also recalled his World War I service with the Professor of Medicine 1921-50 at Queen’s University, knighted in 1950.

When they returned to take the Belfast-Larne train, the Flemings discovered they were missing his lantern slides and lecture notes. The Ulster authorities and British security knew that since 1941 all details of antibiotic production by the World War II Allies had been strictly classified secret. The train was delayed; the Larne to Stranraer ferry’s escort rescheduled. The notes were found, vetted, and restored to Sir Alexander. The Flemings were then allowed on their way back to London and Allison’s Highgate house where Allison kept a pied à terre for visits from Cardiff where he was stationed. The Flemings had been bombed out of their Chelsea home.

WORLD WAR I: FLEMING, THOMSON AND WRIGHT

Captain Alexander Fleming had worked under Colonel Sir Almroth Wright’s command from 1915 to 1918 at Boulogne. Captain WWD Thomson and Captain N Keith of Canada, later of the Mayo Clinic, were junior officers in this Unit devoted to the study of Allied War Wounds and their infection. Harvard’s US 5th General Hospital was also stationed in Boulogne with Professor Harvey Cushing as Commanding Officer, and Professor Roger Lee as Chief of Medicine. Both were friends of Wright’s group, and Cushing collaborated in Wright’s work on war wounds. In 1919 Harvey Cushing was awarded an honorary MD by Queen’s, Belfast. Cushing was in 1926-27 to train Hugh Cairns, later Nuffield Professor of Surgery at Oxford, at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Boston. Cairns, in 1942, both abridged and amplified Cushing’s experience. Lee was to train Professor Maxwell Finland at Harvard.

Fleming, Keith and Thomson were frequent golfing companions at Wimereux where their golfing feats incurred Wright’s displeasure, but did not strain their friendship. Sir Almroth Wright maintained his high regard for the trio. Fleming, when out of sight behind a dune, had dropped a “somewhat self-important Colonel’s ball” so as to fake a hole in one, and demand the customary sequelae of drinks on the Colonel.

In his Campbell Oration, Fleming mentioned neither the secret work on penicillin in the United States since his visit to New York in 1939, nor the efforts of two Musgrave Park physicians to obtain penicillin in March 1941.

WORLD WAR II BELFAST

In March 1941, under optimal circumstances, the preferred treatment regimen for lobar pneumonia was to determine as expeditiously as possible the Cooper type of infecting pneumococcus: to take a blood sample for culture was advised. Before these results were obtained, polyclonal pneumococcal antiserum could be given intravenously with caution. This done, a loading dose of sulphapyridine, then called M and B 693, was given, generally by mouth. Sulphathiazine was thought to have less toxicity, but was new and expensive (Table I). The patient’s hydration, nutrition and mental attitude needed to be bolstered during the course of the disease.
Both Musgrave Park physicians Benjamin Rycroft and Max Rosenheim knew penicillin was extremely effective against pneumococcal (now called streptococci pneumoniae) infections, and that penicillin did not appear to cause nausea, vomiting, heart arrhythmias and diarrhoea, as did M and B 693. Both Rosenheim and Rycroft knew that penicillin was being produced at Oxford and in New York at Columbia University, “in a manner that took over many rooms”.

What Rosenheim did not know was whether specific type XIV anti-pneumococcal serum was available. My father* kept his copies of The Medical Annual in the library of our Dunmurry Lane home. The 1940 edition, which I inherited from him and still possess, has a section on “New Pharmaceutical...”

Throughout this Medical History, “I” or “my” refers to the first author.
Educated 1919-24 at St. Andrews University. After qualifying, he practiced as a general practitioner in Bradford, Yorkshire, from where, starting about five years later, he studied ophthalmology in London during the week, returning to work in Bradford at the weekends. On this regime he was admitted FRCS in 1931 and moved as Clinical Assistant to Sir Stewart Duke-Elder, knighted 1933, at St. George’s Hospital35,36. Benjamin Rycroft published his first paper on human corneal transplantation in 193537. From 1940 to 1942 he served in the 31st General Hospital at Musgrave Park. Torpedoed and rescued on the way to Algeria, he later advised Allied Mediterranean Command for which he received the OBE36,38. Rycroft published the first book in the English Language describing corneal grafts39. Sir Benjamin’s obituary says “he rode to show-standard and hunted”40. He was an accomplished organist, and “all his life he maintained an interest in the piano”40. As Honorary Consultant to the Zoological Society of London, he operated on tigers and horses among other animals. Rycroft, Examiner in Surgery to Queen’s University, Belfast, encouraged by Dickie Hunter, asked candidates in surgery at Queen’s viva questions on wild animal surgery40,41. The average adult female tiger requires a number 15 Magill-type tracheal tube41,42.

TABLE II:

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<th>Ophthalmologists And Pre-March 1941 Penicillin Human Therapy</th>
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<td>1. Drs Frederick Ridley and SR Craddock reported experimental extraction on April 10, 1929, of a concentrated penicillin40. Ridley was later a colleague of Rycroft at Moorfield’s Hospital, London.</td>
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<td>2. Professor Alexander Fleming, late in 1929, treated Dr KB Rogers, an assistant to Sir Almroth Wright. Pneumococcal conjunctivitis was promptly and completely cured41.</td>
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<td>3. Dr Cecil G Paine, a St. Mary’s graduate, grew his own penicillin from Fleming’s strain and in 1933 with ophthalmologist Albert Nutt successfully treated ophthalmia neonatorum at Sheffield Royal Infirmary44,45. From 1932-35 Howard Florey was Professor of Pathology at Sheffield46.</td>
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<td>4. CG Paine, for his eighth case, successfully treated with penicillin a colliery manager who had an intraocular foreign body and pneumococcal infection. Successful extraction was enabled44,45.</td>
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<td>5. On October 15, 1940 Dr Martin H Dawson of Columbia University, New York, NY, began to treat three patients with retinal Roth spots due to subacute bacterial endocarditis, with Columbia-manufactured penicillins42,43. By May 6, 1941, Dawson’s group had treated a total of four patients43.</td>
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<td>6. On February 12, 1941, Dr Charles Fletcher of the Nuffield Department of Medicine at Oxford University started penicillin treatment on policeman Albert Alexander, aged 43. Following a rose scratch, post left-eye exenteration, Alexander developed endophthalmitis and orbital cellulitis. Treatment was initially successful but Alexander died on the 15th March 1941 after Oxford’s supply of penicillin had been exhausted41.</td>
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distributor. The reason that rabbits had supplanted horses was that production of the “higher types” of antipneumococcal serum killed about a third of the horses. This high equine mortality was not experienced in producing lower types I, II and III; in these “original” types equine production probably had higher profit margins. There were more patients for types I, II and III and greater production from the sensitised horses.

As a result of his telephoned investigations, Rosenheim discovered Squibb was about to release “Antipneumococcal Rabbit Serum Type XIV”41,42. Type XIV lobar pneumonia was then relatively uncommon in the United Kingdom. One New York-based study reported type XIV pneumococcus as comprising 16.1 percent of lobar pneumonias in children, but only 2.6 percent in adults. Type XIV produced mortality rates as high as 14 percent in children and 23 percent in adults without bacteremia, and 28 percent in children and 69 percent in adults with bacteremia33.

DISEASE COURSE

On a stormy dawn early in March 1941, I awoke in my bedroom at Windy Ridge, Dunmurry Lane with pain in my right side. I called my father who came in his dressing gown and then returned with a stethoscope44. After listening to my chest, he brought a glass of water, and told me to drink it, and that he would get Rycroft whom I already knew. I asked why I needed an eye doctor. “He kept the city of Bradford in order as a GP”45, my father replied. Rycroft arrived about an
hour later and took a venous blood sample and several throat swabs (Figure 2, Table II).

Later, a tubby, cheerful man appeared in civilian clothes and said to me and my nurse, “I am Max” (Figure 3). He told me that the next three to five days would be like climbing a mountain. I would probably get more breathless and the pain in my right chest was best put up with. He then listened to my chest and said “Angus and the eye doctor are right”. Max gave me an intravenous injection which he said had been made by Sir Almroth Wright and Professor Fleming2 and left, saying he would be back when he had checked up on the eye doctor. A few hours later Rycroft appeared with some pills he made me swallow (Figure 4). Rycroft said in future he would announce his arrival by playing on the piano in the room beneath my bedroom.

That evening I asked my father who Max was, to be told he was a Salopian Johnian52. The nurse, who was from Sligo, said that Max was very nice. “Where was he from?” My father replied, “The Massachusetts General Hospital”. So I asked if he was an anaesthetist. “No, he was Belton Pollard Fellow with Albright and Bauer,” my father replied52. Late the next day Max reappeared and said he had made a lot of people work including Angus and the eye doctor, so he was going to give me back some of my own medicine—so started my intravenous course of Type XIV antipneumococcal serum32. I asked what Rycroft had been forced to do. “Argue with Oxford,” was the reply.

The next day but one, Rycroft changed his piano tune from “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” to “The Blue Danube”. He came upstairs and said, “John, you are better or Max’ s army career is over before it begins”. “Yes, I am,” I replied. “Can I go and see my pony?” “Not yet.” Max reappeared somewhat later. He said he had called Whitby53-56. I replied, “My ancestors there replied, “The Massachusetts General Hospital”. So I asked if he was an anaesthetist. “No, he was Belton Pollard Fellow with Albright and Bauer,” my father replied52. Late the next day Max reappeared and said he had made a lot of people work including Angus and the eye doctor, so he was going to give me back some of my own medicine—so started my intravenous course of Type XIV antipneumococcal serum32. I asked what Rycroft had been forced to do. “Argue with Oxford,” was the reply.

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are dead". Max said he had also been talking with Wright’s people at Mary’s. They had reminded him how to do a Quellen reaction and a precipitin test to type the pneumococci. He said they had no spare penicillin. “Try Oxford and New York,” advised Sir Almroth. So he had given that job to Rycroft, “Because eye-doctors couldn’t get into trouble because of the Duke (Figure 5). Ophthalmologists know more about penicillin than anyone else”. “Good-bye,” said Max. “Go to a college on the Backs of the Cam”.

1941 UNITED STATES IN ULSTER

I never saw Max in uniform during his posting to Musgrave Park. When I asked for an explanation, I was told, “Because he was dealing with the Yanks.” The next month after my pneumonia, April 1941, was the time of the Belfast blitz. The still neutral US War Department issued RAINBOW-5, which detailed the deployment of 30,000 US troops in Ulster. On June 12, 1941, the construction contract for US bases and hospitals in Northern Ireland was signed. Rosenheim, with his recent Harvard experience advised on what Harvard’s Fifth General Hospital and other US Medical Services would require. He liaised with Professor WWD Thomson for WWD’s own experience at Boulogne of Harvard’s Fifth General Hospital in World War I.

THERAPEUTIC ALTERNATIVES

To determine the pneumococcal type from the samples obtained by Rycroft, Rosenheim used concurrent techniques described by Lionel Whitby, Pathologist to the Middlesex Hospital. “Type may be determined by an immediate direct method, by mouse inoculation or by agglutination of a culture.” In the direct method, a small fleck of fresh sputum is well mixed on a slide with a drop of the type I, II or III serum. “After the serum has penetrated into the sputum, a cover-slip is placed over the preparation and it is examined with the 1/6th lens and x10 eyepiece. The capsule of an organism, when in contact with its own specific serum, becomes swollen and the organism itself loses its definition.”

“The white mouse is very susceptible to pneumococcal infection, and if inoculated intraperitoneally with a sample of pneumococcal sputum, not only are the mucus and the cellular elements liquefied, rendering the pneumococci free, but the cocci also multiply rapidly.” The peritoneal cavity of the mouse is aspirated after four hours and the direct method repeated. Under microscopic examination, the capsule of the diplococcus is swollen by its own specific serum. If no swelling occurs, as it did not in my case, the search continued with expensive specific serum for the remaining known, as of 1932-1941, twenty-nine types.

Rosenheim then used mouse inoculation as described by Whitby and obtained evidence of agglutination of a mouse heart blood sample. A suspension of the culture is tested for agglutination in dilutions varying from 1:1 to 1:20 with each of the type-specific sera. The tubes should be incubated in a water bath for one hour at 37°C. The peritoneal washings of an incubated mouse can also provide a suitable suspension for this test. Further confirmation that the infecting pneumococcus was type XIV was provided by the precipitin reaction using the polysaccharide hapten known as Specific Soluble Substance, or SSS from urine.
In 1939, an annotation in this journal on the treatment of pneumococcal infections stated that for a child of seven, an initial dose of M and B 693 of 1.5 0.5g tablets should be followed by 1 tablet every four hours. The Ulster Medical Journal continues, “It is of importance even with this brand of drug that every case should be typed.” “Physicians…may wish to supplement their treatment …with administration of specific serum.” In 1940 a study from Birmingham showed that the mortality in 1,685 successive patients, with lobar pneumonia admitted to the Dudley Road Hospital dropped from 20.5 percent in 1936 and 1937 to 5.3 percent after the introduction of M and B 693. In Birmingham, type I pneumococcus predominated 43%, type III 16%, type II 11%, type XII 5%. The other types were “encountered only sporadically and types XIII, XIV, XXII, XXVI and XXX not at all.” In Los Angeles, California, in the five years from January 1934 through December 1938, type XIV lobar pneumonia represented only 1% of 1,469 consecutive cases of lobar pneumonia. Things were different in Harlem, NY, where type XIV had been shown to be a virulent pneumococcus “selecting by preference infants and young children, in whom the pneumonias are usually of long duration—it is especially prone to invade the blood and prove fatal.”

**PERSONAL SEQUELAE**

My parents complained of the paltry British Army pay. So I asked the cost of my treatment. The M & B 693 sulphapyridine cost £1 per day. My illness cost “a fiver”. The anti-sera were free samples. “The Germans invented a dye called prontosil, for which Professor Domagk was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1939.” The French stole it and the English improved it so you got better and did not go pink or blue. I later asked what a Quellen test was and why Mary’s had to coach Max. “To discover you are Type XIV”. So I asked why I was Type XIV. “Because you probably kissed someone”. “I don’t kiss girls”. “John, you had better go to the Dragon School.”

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Production figures derived from Lord Florey’s *Antibiotics* published in 1949 and US figures declassified in stages post-World War II. The 150-fold increase in US production from June 1943 to D-Day was largely due to irradiation procedures. War-time secrecy and patent protection inhibited and delayed US to British Empire information transfer. The University of Toronto delivered approximately 1,000 Oxford Mega Units to Canadian Armed Forces in May 1944.
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My father wrote to the Dragon Preparatory School on Bardwell Road, just north of Oxford University. Father was told that they were full. So when my father next met his friend Hugh Cairns, Nuffield Professor of Surgery at Oxford, he claims he made him feel guilty for procrastinating on the release of penicillin for me. The excuse was they had “run out on a rose scratch case”. If I had been given the penicillin I would have been the third patient in the first Oxford series (Table III). Professor Cairns, as propitiation, said he would call on the Lynams (Hum and son Joc, co-Head-Masters), and there would be no trouble. I entered the Dragon as a boarder in September 1942 to learn that the most prominent of the Oxford Dons that founded the school in 1877 was a Mr George, who thereafter had his Dragons both male and female: all to be aged seven to thirteen. We Dragons aspired to “robust informality and relaxed vigour”.

Max Rosenheim left Belfast to become officer in charge, Medical Division, in various countries in the Middle East and North Africa, ending his Army service as a Brigadier General and consulting physician to the Allied Land Forces South East Asia.

At one of our teas or Sunday lunches that the Cairns family gave me at their home around the corner from the Dragon School, I asked why Max had been sent so far away. Professor Cairns replied, “Because of your penicillin”. “But I didn’t get any, and anyhow Rycroft did the asking.” “Yes, but we all knew Max was behind it”. Professor Cairns then said “Did you know Rycroft had to swim for awhile on the way to North Africa? He was torpedoed and they had trouble picking him up”. He’s good at using penicillin.
Dr. Lionel Whitby's classic papers about which chemistry Laboratories of King's College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I read about which Max had called Whitby a decade earlier (Figure 8). I was having trouble getting accepted by Clare. My father suggested I ask to see Whitby, Master of Downing and Regius Professor of Physic. In Master Whitby's sitting room we discussed my treatment by Max and Ben. He then asked whether I was applying to Downing. On the train to Cambridge I had thought of my reply, "When I was seven, Professor Rosenheim told me to go to a college on the Backs. I fancy Clare". "I thought of my reply. "When I was seven, Professor Rosenheim was applying to Downing. On the train to Cambridge I had my treatment by Max and Ben. So did Max Finland who was implanted at seven years of age. My recall has been aided by Memory, while obviously fallible, is said to be most reliably estimated by its success in predicting the future. This WHO Position Paper and is now endorsed against a moving target of invasive pneumococcal disease.

**POSTSCRIPT**

Memory, while obviously fallible, is said to be most reliably implanted at seven years of age. My recall has been aided by my father Angus' notes on the course of my lobar pneumonia, which are on pages 5,6 and the inner cover of his copy of Otter's Medicine which had survived bombing in Rennes on June 17th, 1940. Memory was reinforced in later years by meeting with my physicians in Belfast, Cambridge, London and Boston and by parental and uxorial admonitions.

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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