

COMMENTARY

A copy of the following letter (with minor Editorial modifications for purposes of clarity) was recently received by our office.

8 November 1990

Sandoz Medical Publications
Sandoz Pharma Ltd.
CH-4002 Basle
Sveits

Dear Sirs,

The Sandoz representative in Norway has kindly lent me a copy of "Sandoz Illustrated Dermatology" and I would like to compliment you on this work. The many detailed and instructive drawings and photographs make the complex physiological and patho-physiological processes in skin far more comprehensible. This is a book I would like to have in my library.

However, I feel that I should point out a regrettable omission from the book: the lymphatic system has been given far too little attention. The lymphatics are missing in all but one of the many illustrations of the vascular system of the skin. The exception is the illustration on p. 68 where a single lymph vessel is presented in the lower right corner.

The point is that the skin embodies numerous lymphatics. The corium contains two lymph capillary plexuses, a superficial and deep. The former occupies the subpapillary layer near the blood

capillary network whereas the latter plexus lies in the deep layer of the corium. Lymphatics are an integral part of the local immune defense system. Their function is not only to transport various extravascular proteins and excess fluid back to the bloodstream, but they are also the interconnecting pathway between lymph nodes and blood for circulating lymphocytes, Langerhans cells, and other immunoreactive cells.

If a second edition is planned, the inclusion of more illustrations of the lymphatic system would make the work even better.

Yours sincerely,

Arnfinn Engeset
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Editor's Comment:

This note from Engeset underscores the identity problem that lymphology still has as a discrete discipline. There are still too many individuals who conceptualize the lymphatic system merely as "lymph nodes hung together by strings." Indeed, the subject matter in a book *Diseases of the Lymphatic System* (Springer-Verlag, 1985) is devoted exclusively to abnormalities of the lymph nodes disregarding any mention of lymphatics or the circulation of lymph (Witte MH, *Lymphology* 18:143, 1985). Similarly, in a recent catalog of the records and collections of the John Hunt-

JOANNIS SOGRAPHI
 IN PATAVINO GYMNASIO
 PUBLICI CHIRURGIAE PRACTICAE
 PROFESSORIS
 EXERCITATIO
 ANATOMICO-CHIRURGICA
 Habita VII. id. Decembris Ann.
 CIOCCCLXV.
 IN QUA
 THEORIA LYMPHÆ DUCTUUM
 Ex observationibus
 HUNTERI, MONROI,
 Et propriis expositur, & ad Praxim
 Chirurgicam refertur.



PATAVII. CIOCCCLXVI.
 TYPIS COMINIANIS.
 Superiorum Permissu.

Title page of Giovanni Sografi's thesis on the theory of the lymph glands, based on observations by Hunter and Monro, and published in 1766 (Sc.M. H000/227).

er Society (The Hunterian Society, Campfield Press, 1990), an 18th Century thesis on the "Theoria lymphæ ductuum" (i.e., the circulating and absorptive capacity of the lymphatic system) has been translated by the Editors as a thesis on the theory of the lymph glands (Fig. 1). This misguided thinking reminds one of the eminent authority on vascular diseases cited by Kinmonth in his Introduction to his classic book *The Lymphatics* (Arnold, 1972) who claimed that he "doubted if lymphatics existed and if they did they were of no importance." Another opined regarding research into lymph and lymphatics that "you won't find anything out, and if you do, no-one will believe you." Unfortunately, as Drinker well-recognized (Harvey Lectures 38:89, 1937), the importance and existence of lymphatics are apparently appreciated best only when the system breaks down!

Charles L. Witte