

KAROLINSKA INSTITUTET

By

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Karolinska Institutet owes its existence to a war: during the unfortunate campaign against Russia in 1808–1809 the hygienic conditions and army medical facilities were found to be so miserable that in 1810 the military authorities decided to start a school for training “barber-surgeons”. The school was fortunate enough to have from the beginning as one of its professors the well known chemist J. J. Berzelius, who was the first professor of chemistry in the world. Thanks to no small extent to his contributions, the originally small school rapidly developed into a flourishing scientific centre.

In retrospect it may be said that the *Institut* has emerged from a century-long revalry between the physicians with their university training and the “barbers or barber-surgeons”, who later became surgeons. This is also reflected in its name “medico-surgical” *Institut*. The institute was called “Karolinska” in honour of some of our greatest kings, particularly Charles XII.

In contrast to the philosophical concept of medicine of that time, *Karolinska Institutet* appeared—and not least owing to the influence of Berzelius—as a champion of the idea of establishing medicine as a concrete branch of science based as far as possible on exact observations. This new trend of affairs resulted in serious and stubborn struggles with the State Universities, where voices were raised to close down the *Institut*, whose activity was regarded as an incipient undermining of Swedish education. Owing to the opposition offered by the universities the *Institut* was not given the right to qualify doctors until 1861. In 1874 candidates were allowed to graduate there but it was not until 1906 that the *Institut* was granted the right to confer the degree of M.D.

Despite these formal limitations the *Institut* thrived extremely well and the scientific spirit flourished and grew. The *Institut* has succeeded in nourishing and preserving this scientific spirit, which has also been cherished by the State. The scientific expansion of the *Institut* is to

some extent ascribable to the fact that the *Institut* is invested with the privilege of conferring the Nobel prize for Medicine. This duty has been performed by the *Institut* since 1901 and has been a valuable source of stimulation.

Thanks to the active scientific mind of the *Institut* it has for many years been the champion of new ideas and a pioneer paving the way for new disciplines. In this conjunction it might not be out of place to mention that the *Institut* was the first to have a professorship of orthopaedics in Scandinavia. This may largely explain the rapid development of orthopaedic surgery in our country. Sweden with a population of 7.4 millions, now has five professors of orthopaedics: in Stockholm since 1913, in Lund since 1944, in Upsala and in Gothenburg since 1957 and in Umeå since 1958. Thirty hospitals now have a special department of orthopaedic surgery and 6 new departments are planned.

The first course of instruction in orthopaedics in Sweden was held in 1910 at the *Karolinska Institutet*. In the beginning it was simply a polyclinical course, but after appointment of a professor in the subject, voluntary courses were arranged instead. From 1924 the subject was obligatory, and since 1949 the course has been extended to include practical clinical work and an examination. The practical course is limited to one month. Since 1955 orthopaedics is taught according to similar principles in the whole country.

At present the *Institut* accepts 140 students per year: the total number of students is now 1100. The *Institut* has 48 professors, 20 associate-professors, and 260 assistant-professors. The teacher: student ratio is thus relatively favourable. This fortunate circumstance is in part due to the fact that the *Institut* has a fair number of pure research-professorships. The facilities for research are therefore very good.

The *Institut* has always been an independent school responsible only to the Government. This independence appears to have favoured its development, which has progressed with the maintenance of a good balance between teaching and research. In the course of time, and particularly during the last decades, the once small school for professional training has grown into a lively centre of basic research.