

Arthur H. Aufses, Jr., MD Archives

Finding Aid - Arpad G. Gerster private practice patient records (AA005)

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Arpad G. Gerster private practice patient records

Table of contents

Summary information	3
Administrative history / Biographical sketch	3
Scope and content	4
Notes	5
Access points	6
Series descriptions	6

Summary information

Repository:	Arthur H. Aufses, Jr., MD Archives
Title:	Arpad G. Gerster private practice patient records
Reference code:	AA005
Legacy ID from CMS [alternative]:	AA.000804
OCLC Number [alternative]:	882103597
Date:	1881-1923 (date of creation)
Physical description:	* 3 volumes (17 inches) * 5 boxes (25 inches)
Language:	English
Language:	German
Dates of creation, revision and deletion:	Finding aid created by Adrienne Millon-Levin in October 1990.

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

Arpad Geyza Charles Gerster was born in Kassa, Hungary in 1848. He was of Swiss descent and the third of eight children of Nicholas and Caroline Gerster. As a young adult he wanted to become a sailor. Discouraged by his family, he turned his interest towards being a naturalist and eventually settled on a career of medicine. He moved to Vienna in 1866 to study. He received his medical degree from the University of Vienna in 1872. While in medical school he taught himself English. From 1872-1873 he served as a doctor in the Austro-Hungarian army. Shortly after his return to Kassa in 1873, he decided to emigrate to the United States.

During his travels across Europe before embarking to America he visited Volkmann's clinic in Halle. There, he first witnessed the use of the Listerian method of wound treatment. The marvelous results of this method had a profound influence upon Gerster.

Dr. Gerster arrived in the United States on March 9, 1874. Shortly thereafter he bought a private practice in Brooklyn and was appointed surgeon at St. Peter's Hospital (in Brooklyn). On December 14, 1875 he married Anna B. Wynne of Cincinnati. In 1877 he began working at the German Hospital (now Lenox Hill) dispensary and was appointed Visiting Surgeon there in 1878. At the same time, he moved his family to Manhattan and established a private practice on East 23rd St.

On July 1, 1880, Dr. Gerster was appointed House Surgeon at Mount Sinai Hospital. In the operating room Dr. Gerster was a pioneer in the use of aseptic and antiseptic methods. In 1888, Gerster's book *The*

Rules of Aseptic and Antiseptic Surgery was published. It was the first book published in the United States on the subject.

Dr. Gerster maintained affiliations with the German Hospital and the Polyclinic Hospital until 1890 when he left them to concentrate on the reorganization and building of the Mount Sinai surgical services. This level of involvement and commitment from a member of the consulting staff was unusual at the time.

Another important aspect of his duties at Mount Sinai Hospital was teaching the house staff.

In 1896 he again became a Consulting Surgeon at the German Hospital. Around this time, he relocated his practice to East 75th Street. In 1910, he accepted an appointment as Professor of Clinical Surgery at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. From 1911 to 1912 he served as President of the American Surgical Association.

Dr. Gerster was a man of many interests. He was a naturalist who loved camping and fishing. In 1912, he became a Trustee of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks. He travelled extensively, including Puerto Rico, Europe, Canada, and the Bahamas. Additionally, he was a lover of music, especially opera. He taught himself Italian in order to better understand it. He was also an avid reader, favoring the Greek and Roman classics. However, Arpad Gerster's most well known diversion was probably his interest and ability in art. He was an accomplished sketch artist and etcher.

On January 1, 1914 Arpad Gerster was forced by age restrictions to retire from the position of Attending Surgeon at Mount Sinai. He became a Consulting Surgeon to the hospital. In 1916 he became a Trustee of The New York Academy of Medicine. In 1917, his autobiography, *Recollections of A New York Surgeon*, was published. Throughout his career Dr. Gerster published more than 70 professional papers. He maintained his private practice until shortly before his death on March 11, 1923.

Custodial history

These records were donated to the Archives in 1970 presumably by Dr. John Gerster, son of Dr. Arpad Gerster.

Scope and content

This collection contains the private practice records of Dr. Arpad G. C. Gerster. They span almost his entire career as a surgeon in New York City, from 1881-1923. These records are contained in three bound volumes and five boxes. The patient cards were received in three wooden boxes.

The volumes, which were personalized for Dr. Gerster, contain chronological patient records from January 1, 1881 to July 24, 1906. Each patient record has pre-printed slots for the following information: date, age, name and dwelling, business and nativity, diagnosis, treatment, and remarks. Dr. Gerster completed these categories. However, he often had little or nothing to say under 'remarks' and sometimes did not include 'age.' 'Business' was included less often in later years. Presumably, comments under 'treatment' were not completed when not necessary.

The first volume is entirely in German (except for Latin diagnoses). Some of the early entries in the second volume are in English, and by 1892 they are primarily in English. In the front of each volume is an alphabetical index to patients' case records. The last entry in the third volume is on July 24, 1906.

There is a three year gap between the bound volumes of patient records and the first case in the file boxes, which commences on July 26, 1909. Here, cases numbered from 1 - 442 were recorded on pre-printed cards. Some additional questions are included on these cards. These include: civil state, family history, personal history, previous diseases, date of operation, operator, assistant, anesthetist, anaesthetic, amount

and examination of urine (chart to be filled in). On the reverse side are pre-printed anatomical drawings for further notations. These forms were clearly meant for use with patients expecting a surgical procedure. However, these cards were often not completed as many patients did not require surgery. Beginning with case number 444 (January 1911) Dr. Gerster ran out of the pre-printed forms and used plain paper to record his patient information. These records reflect the same information as that on the preprinted cards, however they are more difficult to read.

The patient records reflect a private practice of the time. Although Dr. Gerster functioned as a general physician, his practice revealed a bias towards surgically treatable patients. At this time, it would have been difficult to have an exclusively surgical practice because there would not have been enough business to support it. However, because of Dr. Gerster's abilities and prominence, he came as close as possible to having such a practice. Over the span of the records, the types of cases did not show any significant shift in character. The cases have a great deal of variety. Included among the many diagnoses were rheumatoid arthritis, alcoholic hepatitis, acute nephritis, chronic gastritis, double cleft palate, eczema, inguinal hernia, syphilis, vulva cutis, pulmonary tuberculosis, arteriosclerosis, uterine hemorrhage, and many others. There are a variety of inserts and attachments found throughout the patient records. These include sketches by Dr. Gerster illustrating ailments and abnormalities of patients; correspondence from physicians introducing patients (a number of these are from out of state and many are not in English); pathology lab reports from both the German Hospital and Mount Sinai regarding excised tissue; correspondence from patients; and two radiographic images. (These images are located in: Case Book Number 3, April 17, 1901, and Card File Box 1, in front of Case 104.)

Private patient records such as these are probably uncommon in hospital archives since they do not directly relate to hospital practice. These records are especially interesting because they occur during a period when surgery became safer and more common and when the rise and dominance of surgery as a method of treatment was seen. Additionally, they are of interest because they are the records of Dr. Gerster, an influential and prominent surgeon during his time.

Dr. Gerster's notes end with case number 3670 on February 23, 1923. The patient records continue to October 27, 1923. An unidentified physician apparently took over Gerster's practice shortly before his (Gerster's) death on March 11, 1923.

Notes

Title notes

Restrictions on access

Access is restricted due to the presence of HIPAA-protected Personal Health Information. Please contact the Archives (MSArchives@mssm.edu) for additional information.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published
- **Level of detail:** Full

Access points

- Medical records (documentary form)
- Private Practice (subject)
- General Surgery (subject)

Series descriptions

Reference code	Title	Dates	Physical description
AA005.BV001	File - Casebook	January 1, 1881 - December 30, 1889	1 volume
AA005.BV002	File - Casebook	January 4, 1890 - December 24, 1900	1 volume
AA005.BV003	File - Casebook	January 1, 1901 - July 24, 1906	1 volume
AA005.B001	File - Card file box	July 26, 1909 - February 23, 1923	1 box
AA005.B002	File - Card file box	July 26, 1909 - February 23, 1923	1 box
AA005.B003	File - Card file box	July 26, 1909 - February 23, 1923	1 box
AA005.B004	File - Card file box	July 26, 1909 - February 23, 1923	1 box
AA005.B005	File - Card file box	July 26, 1909 - February 23, 1923	1 box