

## Snow in Chicago

Twenty one inches of snow came down on Chicago in one day in the first week of January, in what was the third worst snowstorm of the century. For a few hours the city ground to a halt, its roads impassable, visibility reduced to a few feet.

Then out came the snow ploughs, for this is a city that once voted a mayor out of office for failing to clear the snow promptly, and soon the main highways were opened again to traffic. Somehow, almost miraculously, the doctors and the nurses all made it to the hospital, as did the patients who had to, such as those on chronic dialysis.

Then the temperature dropped sharply, leaving the streets deserted but for rare ghost-like creatures shuffling through the snow, wrapped in shawls and covered up like the ladies of Isphahan. Some wore operating room masks they purchased or otherwise appropriated?—that made them look like strange exotic birds with large white beaks.

There were casualties. Cars got stuck in the snow, ran off the road, or collided with snow ploughs. An abandoned baby was found frozen near a church. A young man slipped on ice and fractured two vertebrae. Others merely sprained ankles. A very important lady with presumed osteoporosis fell and smashed her humerus in many places. A patient with arteriosclerosis fractured his tibia and had a transient hemiparesis; his carotid arteries were found to be almost totally occluded far gone for extensive plumbing repairs. There were pneumonias classical, lobar in distribution with sputum rustyas well as various viral syndromes with normal chest x rays, some of which were misdiagnosed and treated as bacterial pneumonias.

A young medical intern unexpectedly and inexplicably developed aortic dissection while shoveling snow and required emergency surgery. Attempts at snow removal also resulted in the usual crop of sprained muscles, and in a few heart attacks in men unaccustomed to strenuous exercise, vasoconstricted by the cold, and heedless of the widely publicized advice to avoid such sudden exertions and perhaps delegate them to women and children.

Indicative of our times was the young woman admitted to my service after walking 10 hours in the snow looking for heroin. She had a rip-roaring pneumonia as well as extensive frostbite. She recovered minus three toes and said that she would never do it again.