review of the limited data available suggests that the natural history of untreated PAVA is far from benign. Thus, the recent series of Dines et al is consistent with previous studies in documenting 11 percent mortality from complications directly related to PAVA and clinical progression in an additional 26 percent of untreated patients followed for a mean of six years.

Complications reported after surgical excision are considerably less frequent than those in untreated patients and no mortality and minimal morbidity have been recorded following embolotherapy. It therefore appears that embolic occlusion of PAVA, first reported in 1978, is the current treatment of choice in institutions with the necessary expertise and experience, notwithstanding the unavoidable absence of long-term follow-up of patients treated in this way. A recent review provides a detailed discussion of the various embolic techniques currently available, including both coil and balloon occlusion procedures. Although treatment, in general, should be offered once the diagnosis of PAVA is secure, some limited evidence suggests that the risk of progression or complications in asymptomatic individuals with single small lesions and no OWRD may be minimal. In these cases, it would be reasonable to defer treatment pending evidence of progress. However, it should be emphasized that the evidence to support such a policy of non-intervention is based on a limited number of patients followed for a limited time.

Thus, after almost one century since Churton's first report of PAVA, we continue to strive for increased documentation of the long-term outcome of patients with PAVA. It is only in this way that an accurate picture of the natural history of this enigmatic disease and the consequences of the various treatment modalities will emerge.

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Editor's Note: The world recently celebrated the 850th anniversary of the birth of Moses Maimonides. International seminars, symposia, and publications honored the memory of this physician-philosopher. The commentary which follows pays tribute to a distinguished and compassionate scientist.

Maimonides, an Enemy of Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism has been and continues to be a threat to intellectual freedom and medical progress. We have witnessed repeated instances of non-critical acceptance of medical precepts when these concepts were fundamentally in error. Not infrequently such nondiscriminatory acceptance was caused by an undue reliance upon the fame of the institution or the investigator. Maimonides pleaded with clinicians to exercise independent judgment rather than to advocate their critical role by relying exclusively upon past authorities.

Maimonides revered his predecessors Hippocrates and Galen, but, when necessary, he was critical of them: "For a strong will may lead a man to speak erringly, especially in disputation." Galen noted that diabetes mellitus was a rare disease, but Maimonides would not agree because he observed that he had personally treated 20 diabetic men and three diabetic women in his practice. Maimonides faulted Galen for not classifying the causes of syncope for he noted, "Though everything Galen says is true, it is disorganized, for only if one knows the causes of syncope will he be able to recognize its onset and combat the
cause." He warned, "This is a feeling among the educated men of our time and surely among the multitude. They do not examine a statement by its contents, but by its conformity to the statement of the previous author without having evaluated the former statement." In his Aphorisms of Galen, Maimonides included an important admonition for the practitioner: "Don't believe anyone's theory without testing it yourself."

Maimonides the rabbi-philosopher exercised the same independent judgment as did Maimonides the physician-scientist. He condemned harshly the pseudo-science of astrology. When he was criticized by French rabbis who quoted Talmudic authorities praising astrology, Maimonides responded that it is necessary to be guided by the science of today and not by the opinions of yesterday: "Let us not cast our reason behind us."

The layman's reverence for medical myths recommended by famous personalities is a common phenomenon today. The fact that a distinguished chemist obtained a Nobel prize for research in chemistry made the public susceptible to his pronouncements regarding vitamin therapy. His studies were inadequately controlled and the conclusions have been demonstrated repeatedly to be in error. With bitter satire, Maimonides described a disease of the intellectuals: "If they are applauded they think they know all branches of knowledge and suddenly become authorities. No one opposes them and their popularity increases; so likewise does the disease itself become aggravated."

We honor the life of Maimonides (1135-1204 CE). His originality and his constant testing of "accepted" theories are excellent guidelines for today's physician. His penetrating criticism of predecessors represents a searching mind that is worth emulating.

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