
WHY NOT?

Why not hold a faculty public meeting?

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THE South-West Wales Faculty of the College is proud of its success in organizing a public meeting as an annual event. The Faculty is concerned that its educational meetings attain an interdisciplinary approach to problems, and the public meeting has been an invitation to patients to meet general practitioners and members of the practice team.

These annual meetings are held at the Guildhall in Swansea, and the West Glamorgan Area Health Authority assists the Faculty in organizing the event. The meeting is advertised extensively. Posters are published—courtesy of the printing department at the local psychiatric hospital—and one is delivered to every general practice surgery and public library in West Glamorgan. The Postgraduate Centre also circulates reminders to the doctors. The event is announced in the local press before the meeting and discussed in an article subsequently. The local radio station, which covers the greater part of West Wales, broadcasts an interview with the Faculty Provost a few days before the meeting.

There is usually a panel of five speakers. The Faculty Provost takes the chair, and each speaker is asked to limit his or her talk to a maximum of 10 minutes. The topics tackled over the last three years have been 'The care of the chronic sick in the home' (1980); 'How to get the best use of general practitioner services' (1981); 'Alcoholism' (1982).

The discussion on the care of the chronic sick at home emphasized that people would in general prefer to be looked after by their general practitioner in the event of a severe or terminal illness. There was an appreciation of the technology offered in hospital, but nothing could replace the security of home. Sharing care in terminal illness between home and hospital was discussed. There was support for the development of a hospice in Swansea, and this wish has come to fruition.

It had been feared that complaints of a personal nature might be presented at the meeting to discuss how patients should obtain the best use of general practitioner services. However, this approach was discouraged from the outset by the Chairman of the Panel, which included a Community Health Council (CHC)

secretary and a Patient Committee Chairman. The doctors were heartened to hear that the majority of people present liked their general practitioner and had a satisfactory doctor-patient relationship. An unexpected complaint was the apparently widespread fear of being struck off the doctor's list. It was claimed—notably by members of the CHC—that some doctors were too ready to use the threat of a striking-off procedure. The general practitioners defended the two-way choice as an outlet when communications deteriorate. The audience would not agree, maintaining that the procedure was too weighted in favour of the doctor. Patient committees were felt to be very popular and to have a constructive purpose in good relationships between doctors and patients.

The most successful meeting to date was in 1982 on alcoholism. The panel comprised two doctors, a patient representing Alcoholics Anonymous, an Advice Centre counsellor and an alcoholic's husband representing ALANON (the society of families of alcoholics). This was a totally absorbing and indeed emotional meeting. The histories related by alcoholics were heightened in effect by those given by relatives of alcoholics. The meeting emphasized the magnitude of the problem and the need for realistic diagnosis and help for patients with the disease. The level of awareness among general practitioners was questioned, as was their enthusiasm about referring patients to non-medical agencies. Doctors present at the meeting gained increased insight into this condition.

We like to think that our Faculty public meetings benefit patients, allowing them to speak to and about doctors in a setting outside a surgery or a hospital. We are urged to think of ourselves as educationalists: these meetings help to spread medical knowledge, through the local media as well as by word of mouth. The South-West Wales Faculty have been congratulated by many local bodies for opening doors and showing their human frailties, and the doctors who have attended the meetings have learnt from their patients. Long may this form of education continue!

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