

## *Correspondence*

### **The Present State of General Practice**

Sir,

May I suggest that the training schemes to which you refer in your September editorial might include 'extended' type courses (e.g. six Thursday afternoons) for medical secretaries already in employment, with general practitioners' secretaries and those working in hospitals, the clinical departments of universities and other posts attending together? One needs to know about that part of the work which one does not see, in order to co-operate in an imaginative way. I suspect that some people are afraid of losing staff, but this seems a short-sighted policy.

In any office, a secretary (as distinct from a shorthand-typist) can screen inquiries, deal with some routine work, and help to set her principal's mind and memory free for more skilled tasks. She is equipped to do this by:

- (a) Her background knowledge. Has a doctor time to teach his secretary the elementary principles of medical ethics, how the health service is organized and how to head a letter about a patient? (She will in any case grasp his explanations more easily and thoroughly if she can fit them into a framework of basic knowledge.) A surgeon indicates his personal preferences, but does not teach the theatre sisters their full technique; and a good secretary thinks ahead just as they do—if she is allowed to.
- (b) Her experience in a particular field of work.
- (c) Her knowledge of her principal's wishes in a given situation. Every secretary has to learn this in each new job, and people assume that she acts on this knowledge and not on her own opinions. My friends express a marked appreciation of practices where a secretary or receptionist with this professional attitude answers the telephone; they will accept instructions from someone they know to be telling them what the doctor himself would like done, but they do not want to know what the 'answering service' thinks herself.

Full-time courses are being started, but if someone would initiate short intensive courses teaching would be available for additional groups. People who are dropped in at the deep end do not always learn to swim.

H. E. M. WELCH, S.R.N., S.C.M.

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### **Present State and Future Needs**

Sir,

The hope is expressed early in the report on "Present State and Future Needs" that this will encourage informed discussion. Discussion has been stimulated and we feel encouraged to add a few words.

We are sure few members would quarrel with the statement that the College, as an academic body, must see things as they are, yet one of the most significant facts of the present situation—the monolithic structure