

Editorial

RESEARCH ADVISORY SERVICE

RIGHT FROM the start, the research committee of Council felt the need for advice about the development of research in general practice. Within a year several eminent medical scholars, including the "Regius" at Oxford, Professor A. D. Gardner and Professor (now Lord) Robert Platt, had accepted invitations to join what we called our Research Advisory Panel.

At that time members of the early research committees were starting to gain personal experience in planning individual and collective enquiries. Each new proposal for an investigation was circulated among members of the committee and, usually, also to one or more of those on the Research Advisory Panel; and a 'consolidation' of their comments was sent back to the proposer in the hope that this might help him in developing his ideas.

This phase culminated in a joint meeting held at 41 Cadogan Gardens between the research committee of the day and most of our 13 research advisers. The conclusion reached by the meeting, which had been put forward by all our advisers was that the College should appoint a whole-time director of research. At that time it was uncertain whether he could be found from among general practitioners.

Due to lack of funds, then as now, the idea of a whole-time member of the research team necessarily lay dormant while successive committees went on planning and thinking about other things, including the need for designated research practices, in which research and teaching could be developed side by side.

When these ideas and the need for a whole-time appointment were brought to the notice of the Nuffield Foundation, they agreed to finance an experiment for three years. At once difficulty was foreseen in asking any active general practitioner to give up his practice for a whole-time appointment lasting only three years. Even if the experiment could have been mounted in that form, Council could not have undertaken the responsibility for continuing to support a whole-time director of research with funds then at its disposal.

So the Nuffield experiment was undertaken on a part-time basis

in the hope that superhuman effort might achieve the improbable. A senior member of Council with long experience of the work of the research committee accepted Council's appointment as part-time 'Research Adviser' (the term director was not favoured). During the next three years he developed the office of the Research Advisory Service in parallel with the fledgeling Records and Statistics Unit. Three overseas visits by the research advisor, one to Australia and New Zealand and two to Canada, as well as strengthening links already forged with officers of the research committees of our sister Colleges, carried some of the newer ideas nurtured in our College to general practitioners in other countries. For the first time an outline could be drawn up for investigations which would be undertaken by general practitioners jointly and concurrently in several Commonwealth or European countries.

All this was achieved part-time, while the doctor tried with varying success to carry also a fair load of his partnership practice. The more successful his role as research adviser, the more work he attracted for himself and others in the College research organization, and the less time was left proportionately for his practice, his family and himself. This impossible situation could not be allowed to continue and with the ending of the Nuffield grant in June, the separate appointment of research advisor as we have come to know him, will end. Meanwhile a limited amount of his work will be continued by an enlarged Records and Advisory Unit under honorary directorship, until new arrangements can be made.

Now, as a phoenix, the old idea rises again from the ashes of the Research Advisory Service. The College, now more than ever, needs at least one *whole-time* appointment in its research group. It needs designated research practices, supported by grants, where research and the teaching of research can develop hand in hand. It needs a building identified as the research and teaching centre of the College. More than ever before, it needs money for research and a generous benefactor.
