

TRAINING FUTURE CONSULTANTS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Those who have the interests of medical practice at heart view with alarm the situation which is now arising, whereby a doctor may reach the rank of a consultant in general medicine, surgery, or even psychiatry, or geriatrics without ever having seen a patient outside the walls of a hospital. If he had been fortunate as an undergraduate, he may have spent a week or two with a general practitioner in his practice, but even when he becomes a senior registrar he cannot take part in the domiciliary consultation scheme. That so many of the young specialists now reaching the consultant grade are of such a high standard is an indication of the careful selection exercised by those who train them.

The annual general meeting in November 1958 approved and the council of the College have endorsed a recommendation from the North-east England Faculty that "it is of advantage to intending specialists to have knowledge of general medical practice, and that all should have such experience". In an endeavour to meet this need, and—be it said—to prepare the registrar for a possible future in general practice should he not in the end achieve consultant rank, two pilot schemes are under consideration. Two years ago, the Northern Regional Hospital Board (Scotland) in conjunction with the Executive Council of Inverness-shire evolved a two year programme to enable graduates having two years postgraduate experience to gain further experience in combined posts in hospitals and general practice. Five such appointments were made, and it is reported that the scheme has so far worked satisfactorily. There is news also that a somewhat similar scheme is being worked out in Newcastle upon Tyne.

What is wanted, however, is a sabbatical year for the consultant trainee which he may spend in general practice. Such a year might lack the glamour of a travelling scholarship to the United States or to Europe, but its value to the future consultants would be every bit as great. There is surely a place for the award of a special scholarship to be used by the younger registrars to gain general-practice experience. To make the holding of awards of this kind of value to the recipient, they should be given for merit, and it should be understood that they would stand to the credit of candidates when higher appointments in their specialities are under consideration.
