

The development of the college journal

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WHEN I was asked by the editor if I would consider writing an article on the development of the college journal for publication in the hundredth issue I accepted with some hesitation. I have enjoyed our journal and was prepared to sing its praises. My hesitation was due to the fact that I should have to read, or at least skim through, these many issues. This I have done and my attention to my plan was frequently interrupted by my tendency to read each article right through instead of skimming and collating, for my intention was to note the development of the various activities of the college as outlined in the journal, how one interest displaced another as a main topic, how dramatic innovations gradually became accepted as college policy and how the journal itself grew and matured.

I found to my dismay that a month—the time allotted before the manuscript was required—was far too short, not for the reading, writing and typing, but for the contemplation and planning to make the whole thing hang together in a form which I hoped might be attractive to the reader.

I offer this apology for my shortcomings. I may be accused of providing too many lists of contents, too little criticism or too little continuity of argument. I accept this, but no one will accuse me more strongly than I accuse myself of not doing full justice to a story of incomparable success.

The story of the college journal is a reflection of the story of the college itself. It is an unusual reflection in that it selects the highlights of college history and displays them without distortion. This is a tribute to the honorary editor and his editorial board, who through the years of development have kept a sane and balanced judgement of what to publish and what not.

Entitled the *Research Newsletter* the journal began life in 1953 with three cyclo-styled sheets with the intention of stimulating object (E) of the Memorandum of Association of the College which reads, 'to encourage the publication by general medical practitioners of original work on medical and scientific subjects concerned with general practice'. In this chrysalis stage the accent was almost wholly on research, though news of other college matters filtered through from time to time as the interests of the college widened. It is however true to say that of the three main committees of council, that of research was first to get off the ground in producing results, for Nos. 2, 3, and 4 of the Newsletter discuss the invitation to join the measles investigation, the planning of the morbidity survey, and outbreaks of epidemic vertigo. Each issue of the Newsletter increased in size and interest and this trend has continued throughout the life of the journal.

The undergraduate and postgraduate committees were setting about their tasks, but here results were bound to be slower, and gradually the importance of education problems dwarfed but never eclipsed the work of research, for so long as man retains his curiosity, so long will he be prepared and eager to find answers to his questioning.

By 1955 issue No. 6 consisted of only 36 pages and one imagines that every member

read it from cover to cover. The editorial welcomed William Pickles our first president and gave a résumé of his James Mackenzie lecture, the very first one. Then followed reports: On auricular fibrillation by John Henderson; otitis media as complication of measles by P. O'Brien; a critique of 'Studies on medical and population subjects by G.R.O.' by R. J. F. H. Pinsent; common upper respiratory tract infections by J. Fry; general practice records by P. A. Walford. (This referred to the work of the Research Committee on the obstetric card, and complained of the size of hospital notepaper); hypothermal collapse by C. A. H. Watts; a report of the start of the measles investigation, and a report on epidemic winter vomiting. There was no lack of material and all this was contained in 36 pages of a stapled paperback, size $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

The editorial board of these early days were men who had done a tremendous amount of work in the foundation of the College. They were G. F. Abercrombie, D. G. French, J. H. Hunt, R. J. F. H. Pinsent and G. I. Watson, and though Dr French had perforce to leave us in 1968 the others are still doing this exacting work after 17 years, with the help of a larger team of 15 all told, and the same editor.

A leap forward to August 1956, issue No. 12, 48 pages, shows how matters other than research were beginning to infiltrate the *Research Newsletter*, for this contains a very human address by Annis Gillie on 'The path from middle to old age' and a report on 'The conference on some practical aspects of postgraduate work in the faculties of the college'.

These were interspersed between an editorial on 'Drugs to charm with', an article by W. J. H. Lord on 'Cor pulmonale', 'Some observations on domiciliary obstetrics' by A. E. de la T. Mallett, 'Acute otitis media' by G. I. Watson and progress reports on the chronic bronchitis investigation and pink disease, and news from the Epidemic Observation Unit. An addendum gave college news—a list of faculty representatives on council, a list of new members and a list of awards, one of which was the Hunterian Gold Medal to John Fry.

This amazing list has been put before the readers of this story to remind them that all this bottled up curiosity was freed by the college research committee. The flood has never dried up and the editor has still to pick and choose the articles most suitable for publication.

Before 1956 is left behind, let us have a look at the next issue, No. 13. The editorial was entitled 'Whither general practice'. Under the heading 'Individual studies' an account of the child welfare and maternity services by A. J. Laidlaw was sandwiched between the 'Tamar Valley Flower Rash' by F. H. Staines and 'Planning a group research investigation' by P. A. Walford. Then a memorandum on general practitioner maternity services is followed by a survey of unrecorded cases of cancer from the Yorkshire Faculty, apparently the first faculty research project to be published in the journal.

As we see, the interests of the editorial board were widening but it was not until 1958 that the title was changed to the *Journal and Research Newsletter* in issue No. 18. Much had been reported in the meantime, for members of the college who were primarily interested in medical education had found here a means of expressing their enthusiastic efforts to solve some of the difficult and pressing problems which were besetting the profession. The editor was bombarded by articles and reports on all stages of education, on the efficient practice of medicine from improved premises and the necessity of ancillary help.

The next landmark in the format of the journal came two years later in 1960 when the pages were sewn instead of stapled, thus providing a flat spine on which the date and number of the issue could be printed and seen in the bookcase. *Research Newsletter* is now dropped from the title which becomes the *Journal of the College of General*

Practitioners. The editorial board remains the same, but the editor now has the help of J. F. Burdon who was appointed assistant editor in 1957.

During the previous years publication had been at three monthly intervals and this was continued for several more years. The main change was in the gradual increase in the number of pages which now averaged over 100, and the appearance of photographs of prominent members of the college, and graphs and other illustrations from research projects. Though a fair balance was maintained between research and other topics the problems of undergraduate and postgraduate education take increasing prominence in space and importance as the years pass by. A problem which was soon to be fiercely debated now begins to show itself in letters and articles about an examination as one way of improving the criteria for membership.

The first reference to an examination seems to have come in a letter from G. W. C. Johnson in issue No. 20 suggesting consideration of a diploma in general practice. It is interesting in this connection to recall that the Scottish Council had affirmed on 7 August 1954 that an examination in general practice should ultimately be the main portal of entry to membership. From now on, however, the examination problem acquires increasing import and occupies a considerable amount of space in the journal until finally it becomes a fact of college policy.

The year 1958 saw the formation of the Australian College, the move from the Apothecaries Hall to 41 Cadogan Gardens, the start of the Medical Recording Service, a real interest in practice premises and equipment, the college memorandum to the Hinchcliffe Committee on the cost of prescribing, a trial of the WHO diagnostic code and a proposal to study continuously the morbidity seen in general practice. All these were recorded and discussed in the journal during the next two years.

Looking back at this period of the growth of the college reflected in the journal the reader cannot but be excited by the momentum of development, the enthusiasm of so many members, the help and time so gladly given. The spread of interests of the young college was proving so worthwhile that the reward of hard work was being recognized in other places. But hard work alone was not responsible for this recognition of growth in stature, a growth watched with considerable interest by observers outside the college, some with sympathy, some with perturbation. For the college was being served by men and women of high intelligence, who are still so close to us that we do not always see their true worth in the setting of our times. And it was this intelligence and good sense allied to hard work that was calling attention to the college's growth.

After this diversion let us return to the journal. We have seen some of the developments of 1958 and now in issue No. 22 of 1959 we read the report of the sixth annual general meeting of the college which included for the first time a discussion on a proposed examination for membership. In this issue we see the first mention of the activities of the library committee and the gift of books from Dr Geoffrey Evans, which really put the library on its feet. The Public Welfare Foundation had been persuaded by John Hunt to provide prizes for the best essays by undergraduates and in this issue the essay of the winner is published. It is by P. W. Kershaw of Edinburgh and it was no surprise that the majority of the prizewinners of the first few years of the competition came from that university.

If we look at the contents of this issue we can tabulate them in this way. There are three editorials on (1) the morbidity survey, perhaps the biggest task the college will ever undertake, (2) the perinatal mortality survey and (3) the annual general meeting, at which the membership subscription was increased from three to five guineas with only three dissentient votes. Then followed the fifth James Mackenzie Lecture, a delightfully helpful talk on 'The art of consultation' by G. F. Abercrombie, perhaps the best chairman the council will ever have. Then there are two individual studies, the first a comparison of the maternity services in an urban and in a rural practice by James Maguire of Belfast.

In the contents he appears as James Mackenzie, one of the exceedingly rare errors of proof reading in this carefully edited journal, and mentioned for that reason. The second study is entitled 'The catarrhal child' by R. A. Nichols.

Under College News the headings are:

The sixth A.G.M.
 Medical Recording Service.
 Film survey.
 College hypertension research.
 Gifts to college library.

Then comes Epidemic Observation Unit with reports on pityriasis rosea and farmer's lung investigations. Practice Premises and Equipment produces a description of an easily adjustable bed. Under Faculty Research is described a project by the Northern Home Counties Faculty Research Subcommittee on intractable pain.

We have by no means finished yet for Postgraduate Education heads an article on 'Talking' by T. S. Eimerl and Undergraduate Education has two, the first on the teaching of sexual and marital relations to medical students and the second on the Public Welfare Foundation prize essay already mentioned. Finally, yes finally, comes Correspondence. There is one letter only. This column has never proved very lively, probably because the issues are too far apart to keep up the requisite thrust and parry for success.

Here is meat for anyone's taste, all readily digestible and absorbable in less than an hour's reading. The contents of this issue have been spread before the reader, not because they differ in quality from the others but to remind the reader of the vast amount of work the production of these various articles entails. A glance at the printed contents may make little impact, but putting them in typescript has at least impressed the writer with a sense of appreciation newly garnered.

Reference has already been made to the first issue of 1960 with its flat spine. This issue, No. 26, had three notable contents. The result of 'The prevalence in Great Britain of pernicious anaemia research' was published under the name of E. Scott the recorder of this collective investigation; an article on 'The clinical epidemiology of influenza, by G. I. Watson covered 36 pages, possibly the longest article to be published in the journal; a report of the seventh annual general meeting of the college recorded that a special resolution to introduce an examination for membership was defeated by the narrowest of margins.

During this year a further notable event was the start of the photocopying service, financially supported by John Wyeth & Brother Ltd., and assisted by the library resources of the Royal College of Surgeons. This enabled members to get free copies of texts from our own and other libraries for the asking, while the service was available to others for a fee.

Passing on another year to 1961 we find recorded more and more investigations by those of an enquiring mind, and further stretching of the college's tentacles into the work of other bodies whose interests coincided with those of general practice. Issue No. 31 of May of this year contained ten clinical studies and three clinical notes, but now the journal has increased to over 160 pages and there is room in addition for the Report of the Joint Working Party with the Royal College of Nursing on 'The Health Visitor and the Family Doctor'; also seven items of postgraduate news, news from the Australian College and seven items of college news.

The college news showed the increasing interest of members in the recording service, practice equipment and premises and the library, while the postgraduate news gave information about university courses, the Upjohn Travelling Fellowships and the Nuffield Travelling Fellowships and Assistantships. In addition to this galaxy of reading matter, there was an editorial on 'Hospital staffing' emanating from the report on the medical

staffing structure in the hospital service under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Platt, which had recently been published.

The journal has now reached the size where selective reading begins to replace total consumption. From now on few doctors will read each issue from cover to cover. A glimpse of the contents will direct the attention to this or that article, but the days of encompassing the news of the college activities within 30 to 40 pages have now gone and will not return.

We turn now to 1962 to find the next landmark in the story of the journal, for this was when the college received its coat-of-arms, and the unicorn and lynx on either side of the black and white shield, over which perches the owl with the gavel, now appear on the cover of the journal, which incidentally has been accorded a glossier finish. The subscribed motto *Cum Scientia Caritas* is reflected as usual in the contents of this issue, for they are distributed between scientific research and caring for people, the term 'people' being inclusive of doctors as well as patients.

The development of the journal, as has already been said, reflects the growth of the college. Anyone who was involved in college council matters at that time will recall that though tentative tentacles were being spread in many directions the main concentration of new thinking was about education, both undergraduate and postgraduate and the organizational side of practice, which included premises, equipment and ancillary help. This covered pathological and radiological services as well as the attachment of health visitors, district nurses and midwives to practices. These items which were stretching the college's abilities to a maximum are from now on a recurring feature in the journal and indeed the first momentum has lost little of its strength today.

The year 1962 provided a number of notable events, both in the life of the college and in the journal. The eighth James Mackenzie lecture was given by Annis Gillie and is reported in full with an excellent photograph of her. A register of toxicity and side-effects of drugs is opened. The purchase of 14 Princes Gate is announced with an invitation to view the new headquarters. With sadness the deaths of Ian Grant and E. A. W. Marien are announced. These two had each served the college well, the former fulfilling a full life span and the latter leaving us in his prime.

This year we find the first addition to the editorial board, which had worked so hard and so well from the start. To produce up to four editorials in every two-monthly issue is no mean feat, but to offer readable, challenging editorials on the pressing problems of the day is merely a description of the intelligence and dedication of the members of the board and the editor. Now they are joined by M. I. Cookson and George Swift, thus highlighting the importance of the future of the maternity services and medical education and the advisability of having good interpreters of the college's activities.

Just as a gradual change in opinion on the advisability, and perhaps necessity, of an examination for membership was taking place in the college, so were other changes, which we now accept as a normal pattern, being argued over in their early stages. These were often disturbing to the uninitiated, but once free argument in council and faculties was given full play, a consensus of opinion was formed and new ideas which were considered drastic at the outset soon became commonplace. One example is that of appointment systems in general practice. An editorial in February 1963, issue No. 38, says of this: "We are not yet fully convinced of its merits", but today, seven years later, practices without an appointment system must be in a minority.

The year 1963 saw the twenty-first issue of the journal. It was numbered 39, but the first 18 of these issues were entitled *Research Newsletter*. This issue was largely devoted to practice organization and included reports on the age-sex register, the use of the 'E' Book, the 'practice index' and the College classification of disease amended version 1963. Now for the first time there is an increase in the price of the journal. Since its inception

the subscription had remained at one guinea per annum for four issues, or 6/- per copy. It is now raised to two guineas and 7/6 per copy. In these inflationary days that seems no great increase in ten years.

In this last issue of the year we find the first serious probe into the medical schools to inject the idea of departments of general practice. This was in the form of a letter from Richard Scott, chairman of the undergraduate committee of council, and was addressed to the deans of medical schools, the medical press and to medical students. This startling innovation—startling at least to many academic bodies—has now been largely accepted and the influence of general practice has infiltrated every medical school, though some still seek to minimize it.

The issues of the next year, 1964, for the most part were orientated towards medical education. An editorial on the Gillie Report starts the new year with notes on undergraduate education, postgraduate education, practice organization and method, and the field work of the family doctor by A. Murray Scott, George Swift, Lowell Lamont and Annis Gillie, in that order.

John Hunt spoke to the South London Faculty on the need to strengthen the educational criteria for admission to membership. J. M. Henderson gave the tenth James Mackenzie lecture, continuing the tradition begun by William Pickles of giving a new slant on that fine man and his work. Sometime these lectures will be collected not only for the interest of the subject matter but also to show the calibre and ability of our chosen speakers. In general practice one chops and changes from one subject (or one patient) to another in rapid succession and the sustained thought required for the building of a James Mackenzie lecture means prolonged concentration and hard work and the burning of midnight oil. It speaks well for the College that it has never been at a loss for the right man or woman.

The clinical side of medicine has not been ousted by this concentration on education for this issue also contains reports on 'mild' bronchitis, warts in general practice, multiple sclerosis and pityriasis rubra. In addition there are clinical notes on manipulations, Caplan's syndrome and a curious twin abortion.

Later this year an editorial discusses training for general practice and commends the Wessex scheme which had got under way with success, the accent here being on vocational training. An innovation in 1964 is the publication of the journal on alternate months, that is six issues a year instead of four as hereto. Hard work it must have been for the editorial board and yet they waited two more years before adding to their numbers.

Doctors now are moving more and more into groups; interest free loans are becoming available for improving and building premises. An interesting and helpful experience of A. C. Catanach on obtaining a group practice loan gives point to this problem in this issue.

For the next three years the two-monthly issues of the journal remained physically similar, consisting of a little over 100 pages with topical editorials, articles on college affairs, on general practice abroad in Austria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Israel, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. In 1965 Richard Scott gave the eleventh James Mackenzie lecture; the College set up a working party on vocational training; J. C. T. Sanctuary and others gave an account of the attachment of a home nurse to their practice. Individual studies, personal points of view and therapeutic trials continued to have headings for this kaleidoscope of observations, including colour tagging of record cards.

In 1966 the editorial board was at last strengthened by the addition to its members of M. J. Linnett and I. R. McWhinney. The year is also noteworthy for the giving of the twelfth James Mackenzie lecture by R. M. S. McConaghey and by the first discussion of

"The Pill". Issue No. 60 of January 1967 recorded the resignation of John Hunt from the secretaryship of the college, an office he had held with the greatest possible distinction from the foundation of the college. At the same time his services were recognized by the conferring on him of a Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons *honoris causis*. His place as secretary was taken by B. C. S. Slater.

During 1967 the Oral Contraceptive Investigation got under way; a plaque was placed on the façade of No. 14 Princes Gate in memory of the late John F. Kennedy; the editorial board was once again enlarged by the recruitment of W. G. Keane and J. F. Burdon, hitherto assistant honorary editor. This is the year when the college becomes royal and the new title appears for the first time on the cover of issue No. 62 of May 1967.

In 1968 a further change occurred, for the journal is now to appear monthly; the subscription is raised to four guineas, single copies 10s. 6d. It is henceforth to be published by E. & S. Livingstone, though still printed at its usual place by the Devonshire Press of Torquay. Now computers make their first appearance and a discussion arises on their place in general practice. Several references were made to the attachments of health visitors to practices, a subject of startling innovation only five years ago. The training of medical secretaries got prominence. The first William Pickles lecture is given by P. S. Byrne. The Medical Recording Service got a write up; from a budget of £25 and 27 listeners in 1957 it now has six full time staff in addition to its two honorary directors. Again the editorial board is enhanced by the addition of the names of D. J. Pereira Gray, R. M. Griffiths, B. C. S. Slater, I. H. Stokoe and J. R. Miles, and diminished by the loss of D. G. French. The monthly production of the journal is taxing the editorial board and provision is now made to cope with it.

The present 10 ins. by 7 ins. blue journal arrived in January 1969 with an editorial seeking guidance on future contents. Still to be published monthly, with now some 60 pages, its total content is probably no less than the previous smaller issues of 100 pages. During 1969 much consideration was given to education and vocational training in editorials and articles. A series on sports medicine appeared and there was still room for several individual studies and points of view. This was the year of the death of our first president, William Pickles of Aysgarth, and thanks to the generous help of his daughter and her husband a full list of his work and many of his medical possessions are now in the College archives.

Finally we come to 1970. It is during this year that the hundredth issue of the journal is due to appear and it is this achievement that sparked off the idea of writing this story. An achievement, and no mean one, it is, and much credit must go to the honorary editor who steered the frail craft of the *Research Newsletter* through the rough unknown waters of the early years, who swapped his craft three times for a bigger boat, and slowly enlarged his crew from five to fifteen members.

I suggested at the start that the story of the journal would reflect the story of the college. Indeed it has formed a potted history of events recorded usually a month or two after they happened and thus seen in better perspective. The first issues were small and of general interest and read through by most readers. As the pursuits of the college widened and by virtue thereof became more specialized, so have the articles become more specialized and it is unlikely that anyone would wish to read each article of each issue in its completeness. A glance at the contents, sensibly placed inside the front cover and thus easy to find, indicates which subject one wants to study, which to flick through and which to ignore. For example in the August 1970 number there is an excellent article on dental anaesthesia which will be welcomed by the many doctors who do this work, but probably not read by the majority. On the other hand the legal and ethical problems of addiction discussed by an expert will attract all readers, for this subject is in the minds of all family doctors at this moment.

Whether the journal continues as a monthly issue, whether in time it becomes a quarterly publication, whether it embraces some or all of the faculty journals are problems for the future. All one can say is that so long as it remains in such hands as the present editor and his editorial board it will be good reading and the only way to keep abreast of college thinking and doing.

Supplements to the journal

The story of the journal is not complete without reference to the supplements, published and distributed with the journal from time to time. These are of two kinds. There are the symposia arranged throughout the faculties on subjects of importance to general practice; and there are articles on topics of the day, prepared usually by council or one of its committees. These run *pari passu* with the editorials of the journal as they outline the subjects being discussed at headquarters and in the faculties. In order of appearance the cast is as follows:

- 1956 General practice obstetrics.
The complications of measles.
- 1957 An obstetric survey.
- 1958 On undergraduate education and the general practitioner.
- 1962 A guide to research in general practice.
- 1963 Guidance of students visiting a general practitioner.
- 1965 Special vocational training for general practice.
Present state and future needs of general practice.
Additional payments for wide experience and notable service in general practice.
- 1966 Evidence of the College of General Practitioners to the Royal Commission on Medical Education.
General practice in the new towns of Britain.
- 1967 Education in psychology and psychiatry.
Implementation of vocational training.
- 1968 General practice in S.W. England.
Obstetrics in general practice.
The practice nurse.
- 1969 General-practice teaching of undergraduates in British medical schools.
- 1970 Study of a general practitioner's workload in S. Wales.
Present state and future needs of general practice. Second edition.

From 1965 these have been published under the title of "Reports from General Practice".

APPENDIX

Anatomical study of the Journal

- 1953 Title—*Research Newsletter*, size 8½ x 5½ ins. Published February, May, August, November. Gradual increase from 30 to over 100 pages. Stapled paperback.
- 1958 Title changed to the *Journal and Research Newsletter*.
- 1960 Pages sewn, flat spine with title, number and date. *Research Newsletter* dropped from title.
- 1962 Coloured College coat of arms on glossy white cover.
- 1964 Six issues a year.
- 1967 Monthly issues. E. & S. Livingstone now publish. Printers as before, Devonshire Press, Torquay. Title now *The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*.
- 1969 Publication monthly in blue cover with College coat of arms in black, size 10 ins. x 7 ins.

Some notes on the circulation of the Journal

- 35 copies are exchanged with other journals.
- 10 advance copies are sent to the medical press.
- 13 advance copies are sent to the daily press.
- 118 copies are sold outside the College in Great Britain and Ireland.
- 201 copies are sold abroad to most countries.