

when it deserves to be discussed, or alternatively, it is inaccurate, in content or comment, when it deserves to be answered.

Stimulus to improvement

Furthermore, if part or all of these criticisms are justified then publication may in itself prove to be beneficial to general practice. Earlier this year, Fraser Rose², a distinguished past President of the College, stressed the importance to general practice and the College of the work of Collings,¹ whose report in 1950 was critical of general practice. Others like Talbot Rogers³ have also emphasised how that criticism acted as a stimulus to the improvement of quality in general practice.

This paper questions the quality of general practice. The arguments are documented in detail: the references are given in full. "Those who agree with Fry that 'general practice in Britain is full of promise for the future' must justify their faith with facts."⁴

REFERENCES

- 1 Collings, J. S. (1950). *Lancet*. **1**, 555-585.
- 2 Rose, F. M. (1972). In *The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, **22**, 342.
- 3 Talbot Rogers, A. (1972) Albert Wander Lecture, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, **65**, 109-118.
- 4 *Transactions of the Hunterian Society* (1966-67). p. 117.

POSTGRADUATE ADVISERS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

GENERAL practitioners are generally individualistic in outlook and tend to have an instinctive distrust of colleagues who appear to join an administrative hierarchy. Why then does the College support the appointment of Postgraduate Advisers, who are they, and what do they propose to do?

The new concept that the purpose of undergraduate medical education is to produce a basic doctor who will need further postgraduate education before being proficient enough to follow a career in any branch of medicine, has enormously increased the responsibilities of postgraduate deans. This has been most obvious in the field of general practice, particularly if the views of the College on vocational training and preparation of young doctors for the M.R.C.G.P. are to be implemented.

Specific teaching for general practice implies the need for teachers; the need for teachers implies that they must have opportunities to learn their job as well as opportunities to keep themselves up to date in clinical medicine. Continuing education must of course be available for all doctors in active practice.

A situation where all these educational needs are available will not arise spontaneously. There is a need for general practitioners themselves not only to advise but to work to attain the College's aims. The Council for Postgraduate Education proposes the establishment of general practice subcommittees of each region's postgraduate committee, but to be effective these committees will require an executive to implement their decisions.

The policy of the College to appoint its own tutors to work alongside and in support of clinical tutors was wise, but there is a need also for someone to work alongside Postgraduate Deans, with their ever increasing field of responsibility. There is also a need for close liaison with undergraduate departments of general practice, so that vocational training for general practice proceeds in a rational transition in the education of the complete general practitioner.

To carry out these tasks, 11 general practitioners have already been appointed as

part-time Postgraduate Advisers in general practice to work with Postgraduate Deans, and others are carrying out the work in a voluntary capacity.

Adviser is possibly a misnomer, as much of the work should be executive in implementing advice given by regional general practice subcommittees and college tutors. There is also a need to support the efforts of college tutors and teachers of general practice, to liaise closely with medical schools and the staffing departments of regional hospital boards, or their successors. Nevertheless advice must be given, and is perhaps most important in the field of career guidance to young graduates, and in helping to formulate the overall policy of postgraduate deans' departments.

Those who have already been appointed to these posts have all been experienced general practitioners who have, over the years, been helping to develop the College's policies, and they all remain part-time in active practice. This continuing contact with every day practice seems to be vital to the success of the appointment, though it does present problems in the organisation of a partnership, though perhaps no greater than those caused by doctors who do several clinical assistant sessions. In future experienced college tutors and general practice teachers should provide a strong source of excellent regional advisers, and it seems that those appointed will take an important part in developing and maintaining standards of postgraduate education.

One word of warning—those who are appointed Postgraduate Advisers in general practice must never allow themselves to become remote dictatorial administrators. The value of the advice that is given will depend on the ability to heed the advice given by their colleagues—the teachers, the college tutors, the consultants and, most important, the aspirants to general practice—with whom they will have to work.

HAIR, HEALTH AND HISTORY

ARCHAEOLOGISTS are not only interested in man's past deeds, but also in the remains of man himself which have been preserved by chance, or even by intent. A study of both can reveal much about people in the past, how they lived, and how their way of life was influenced by food, drink, homes and customs. New methods of analysis enable quantitative studies of some substances in animal tissue to be estimated, almost to the nearest molecule, and as each new technology appears a new look can be taken at sources of material for study.

Nowadays the nutrition of developed countries is based on the harvesting of all the continents and so our composition may reflect some characteristics of the Canadian prairie, the Tasmanian orchard or the New Zealand sheepfarm. Produce of Danish dairies and Israeli orangeries dilute and alter the proportions of the trace substances we ingest from home-grown produce, whether grown in our own gardens or in the nursery a mile up the road.

The open field system of agriculture of the Middle Ages meant that villages literally lived off their own land, sending their surplus to the nearest town; townspeople too were partakers of their near rather than their distant environment. The passing of the Enclosure Acts may well have altered local patterns of distribution, but to this day some counties remain self-supporting in greenstuffs, sending the surplus to Covent Garden or elsewhere.

Many of the substances which the new techniques can measure with uncanny accuracy are excreted in skin, nails, bone and hair, the latter providing a slow but nevertheless effective way of eliminating some of the less useful elements from the body.