

TWENTY YEARS ON

MOST doctors practise for about 40 years; 20 years in the life of the academic body of general practice is therefore an appropriate time for review. In different phases, different activities in the College became dominant, the work being reflected in the main committees; progress in one area was often dependent on achievements in another.

The executive committee of the College is the Council. In the early years, the honorary secretary J. H. Hunt was the outstanding figure. Particularly notable contributions were made by G. F. Abercrombie, Fraser M. Rose, and Annis Gillie, all of whom were both Chairman of Council and later President.

Research

Right from the start the research committee was one of the most active through the dynamic drive of its first chairman, R. J. F. H. Pinsent. General-practitioner research had been identified by the Steering Committee as one of the most urgent aims and the College chose as its first President, W. N. Pickles, who symbolized research achievement.

The committee encouraged practitioners both to do and to report their own research, and this *Journal* emerged originally as a research newsletter. New research tools such as Eimerl's E-book were developed.

The Epidemic Observation Unit led by G. I. Watson and the Research Unit at Birmingham led by R. J. F. H. Pinsent and D. L. Crombie, were the first of their kind in the world.

Practice organisation

The tempo of work in practice organisation increased in the late 1950s and gradually became dominant. Many of the new techniques of general-practitioner research were now applied to organisational problems.

This committee showed that a revolution in practice organisation was needed; during the decade of the 1960s it was achieved. Among the mass of organisational changes, such as appointment systems, three fundamental principles emerged—record keeping, group practice, and the team approach. G. Adams was prominent in pioneering new ideas.

So many of the necessary organisational changes depended on finance that it was not surprising that this feverish activity coincided with the medicopolitical crisis of 1965–66, the family doctors' charter, and the new system of reimbursement of practice expenses. There was overlapping of both ideas and men, for example E. V. Kuenssberg, one of the "six wise men" who negotiated the charter for the British Medical Association, soon afterwards chaired the practice organisation committee which he had done so much to develop, and later the College Council.

Membership examination

Internal conflict over the introduction of an examination was one of the few examples of a major academic disagreement in the College. The struggle to start a formal examination by the College was won by those who rightly saw this step as an essential prelude to the development of the College's educational plans.

Once the principle was accepted, the examination steadily gained in stature and membership has since been recognised as an additional qualification by the General Medical Council.

Education

At first there were separate undergraduate and postgraduate committees. The undergraduate committee led by G. O. Barber and R. Scott quickly made an impact. Postgraduate education was more difficult, but soon responded to the stimulus of its committee which was guided by Annis Gillie and G. Swift.

During the 1960s education gradually succeeded practice organisation as the main focus of the College's activity. Once general practice had defined its area of interest (research), had begun to modernize itself (practice organisation), it became increasingly possible to contemplate teaching (education). Thus success in practice organisation was a prerequisite for the later educational developments and *Teaching Practices* (1972) shows the close connection between these two themes even today.

The College identified early three educational aims; first the introduction of all undergraduates into general practice, secondly the introduction of a specific post-registration training period for general practice, and thirdly continuing education for established principals. All three appear in the early letters of 1951 and 1952 (see *Crucial correspondence*) and in the steering committee report.

The enormous challenge of these three targets required a remarkable team. The education committee united its separate parts and emerged as equal to the task, partly because of the outstanding work of J. P. Horder, the current chairman.

The undergraduate position is vastly improved, the principle of vocational training is now accepted and the next target is no longer selling the idea but developing the teaching practices with which to implement it.

Only in continuing education do fundamental problems still lie ahead. It is however encouraging that the *College Journal's* circulation is now the highest ever and that the Medical Recording Service Foundation of the College, the first and largest organisation of its kind in the world is continuing to expand under its original directors John and Valerie Graves.

The College today

The College has proved to be a classic example of a whole being much more than the sum of its component parts. The College today is more active than ever before; research continues and the oral contraceptive project, the largest multi-practice study in the world, is in sight of a major report; the newly-published *The Future General Practitioner—Learning and Teaching* has been written by six members of the education committee; and the board of censors will examine a record number of over 250 candidates for membership this year.

The pattern of the first 20 years has been the encouragement of individual initiative. The committees have clustered around activists rather than *vice versa*, and tolerance of strong personalities has been traditional. However, 20 years is half a generation. Can the pioneers be replaced?

The future now depends on the younger generation who owe their predecessors an enormous debt, a debt that can only be repaid in kind—by the further development of the College. The new generation will in their turn be judged—another 20 years on.

REFERENCES

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