

G. I. Watson, Foundation Councillor, Director of the Epidemic Observation Unit and President 1970–72.

These and many more wrote what mattered when it mattered most. A selection of their letters is republished today and we thank all concerned for permission to reprint.

It is sometimes said that writing letters for publication is a waste of time; that letters to editors may stimulate a passing thought and then are lost for ever; that major policy is decided in closed committees, not open to the rank and file.

These letters disprove this thesis. They show that if enough people care and take the trouble to write then collective action is possible. These letters encouraged the Steering Committee who wrote (we) “are assured of loyal and active support from many quarters”. They also changed the name of the College and proved an indication not only of the strength but of the sources of support. This correspondence was crucial.

REFERENCE

British Medical Journal (1952). College of General Practitioners—Report of the Steering Committee, 2, 1327.

Dr G. I. WATSON

DR. G. I. WATSON ends this month a two-year term as President of the College. He has achieved much in many ways, particularly through his clinical work, his travelling, and his personality.

Throughout his term of office he has been, and has been seen to be, a practising clinician and is well-known as an authority on virus diseases. He has made a unique contribution in creating and developing the Epidemic Observation Unit which was historically the very first research unit of the College. It was Dr Watson who pioneered the first major multi-practice research project on the management of measles which arose directly from his Sir Charles Hastings prize essay. He was, later, the first ever to win the Hastings prize twice.

Secondly, by his travelling he has knitted the College together, by visiting many of the far-flung units. In New Zealand this autumn he completed the noteworthy achievement of having attended all the Regional Councils of the College in person.

His personality has ensured a successful presidency. He has contributed a characteristic dignity—few who heard it will ever forget his speech for the College at the 1971 council dinner.

Dr Watson faced the personal challenge of succeeding John Hunt and being succeeded in turn by Prince Philip, he has, however, ensured by his own individual style that his, the seventh presidency, was no *interregnum*, but will be seen as a further significant step in the development of the office. The College is fortunate that he is continuing to serve during the next year in the new post of deputy President.

ONE HUNDRED UP!

THIS month the hundredth notification form is bound into the pages at the back of the *Journal*. The first one appeared in the issue of February 1958, which itself was the first on whose cover the word *Journal* as well as *Research Newsletter* No. 18

was printed. Prior to 1958, notification forms had been attached to occasional red or yellow warnings about epidemics which had been reported to the Epidemic Observation Unit. Yellow warnings were of limited distribution, usually to single or adjacent faculties, while red warnings were sent out to all doctors whose names were included in the Research Register.

Some of the outbreaks were given code names based on the reporter's name, place of practice and year of notification: KL/56 (Kelly, Leicester, 1956)—an outbreak of aseptic meningitis and rash caused by ECHO type 9 virus; LW/57 (Laidlaw, Worcester, 1957)—an outbreak of "fluctuating headache of sudden onset, giddiness and nausea" for which no infective agent was identified; or SWP/57 (Simpson White, Plymouth, 1957)—a localised outbreak of upper respiratory infection with the rash of erythema multiforme. Incidentally Dr Simpson White is one of only two doctors who have made use of all the notification forms which have been published in the *Journal*—the other being Dr Hendry of Cupar, Fife.

After the notification form was introduced it also appeared as a card. Packets of postage pre-paid additional notification cards were sent on request to regular users between the quarterly issues of the *Journal*, listing the diseases about which information was currently required. When the diseases which were notifiable for research purposes changed, a fresh sticker showing the new list was sent out. The first list included Bornholm disease, scabies, rubella in family contacts, leukaemia and aplastic anaemia, and new cases of pernicious anaemia. In all, about 50 different studies have been assisted in this way by putting those in possession of information in touch with those who needed it for research purposes. More than 20 different published reports have been based on data collected in part or wholly through these notification forms.

The purpose behind these forms, indeed the intention of the Epidemic Observation Unit itself, cannot be better described than in Will Pickles' introduction to his book on *Epidemiology in Country Practice*, a new edition of which has just been re-issued by the College: "The object . . . is primarily an attempt to stimulate other . . . doctors to keep records of epidemic diseases and to put before them the unique advantage that their position gives them, to impress on those interested in epidemiology the value of the natural-history method of investigation of these diseases . . ."

". . . I have known several country practitioners with useful knowledge to impart, gathered from their own observations, but who considered it too trivial even to write down, much less to publish. Nothing is further from the truth and by withholding these observations from the public these men are damming up sources of information that are among the only accurate ones from which such information can be drawn."

REFERENCE

Pickles, W. N. (1939). *Epidemiology in Country Practice*. Facsimile edition 1972. London: Royal College of General Practitioners.

Dr FRASER M. ROSE

We record with deep regret the death of Dr Fraser M. Rose, President of the College 1962–64. An obituary notice by Dr John Hunt will appear in the next issue of the *Journal*.