

than expedient. As to speed of development, I would have thought that the cheaper any proposal is, the more likely it is to progress—but at the price of more service demand and less time for teaching and research.

Finally, may I commend the concluding section of the report which neatly says that no one yet knows the best way, or best ways, to develop a good university department of general practice, and which encourages all of us to experiment—exactly what Aberdeen is trying to do. And, I may add, to do this we have entered into a satisfactory and mutually respectful partnership with the Royal College of General Practitioners.

I. M. RICHARDSON
Professor of General Practice

REFERENCE

Byrne, P. S. (1973) Supplement No. 1, 23, *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*.

CHOOSING A PRACTICE

Sir,

Having recently been through the mill of finding a practice, I read with interest your series of articles on this subject in the December *Journal*.

Fortunately, I was able to spend a year in a good teaching practice, but several of my friends were disappointed with theirs. Some of them were even grossly exploited as unpaid assistants and received very little tuition. Perhaps there is a need for a feedback of information to the trainer selection committees from all trainees at the end of their attachments. If compulsory vocational training is to be implemented, from where are all the trainers to be recruited without lowering the standards?

I found that some advertisements for practices were excellent, whereas others were significant for the facts omitted, e.g. poor facilities, low salaries, sleeping partners and grossly unequal rotas. Box numbered advertisements, which regrettably the *College Journal* accepts, were often the most deceptive.

The grapevine could be, a useful source of information. In large towns, vacancies in the better practices were often filled without advertisement by direct contact with the local hospital mess. The worst training practices were filled by doctors from more distant medical schools, as the grapevine had deterred local applicants. Sometimes the grapevine could prove very misleading. The 'great fellow' from the 'old Medical School', the Chairman of all the local committees, or the general practitioner who referred all his private patients to your 'boss', was not necessarily running the most desirable practice, despite the opinion of your chief. For every

golf fanatic or medical politician, there may be a junior partner managing the practice in his absence.

Interviews enabled me to see a spectrum of working conditions. I was able to visit some excellent practices, but I also met in my travels, rogues, misers and gross eccentrics, who were dedicated to money and not medicine. Some were unaware of the value of vocational training and would not give credit for completing a recognised course. It is impossible to assess a practice in one afternoon and to delve beneath the rosy façade presented by the interviewers, especially if it is out of the range of the grapevine.

My advice to younger doctors about to enter family medicine is to find a good trainee post, preferably on the recommendation of former trainees. Failing that, if family commitments allow, become a roving locum for a few months. It is important to have every agreement in writing as they can mysteriously change between interview and appointment. Believe no one, double check through the grapevine and be prepared for some surprises and disappointments. With luck, most of us find a suitable practice eventually.

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE COLLEGE

Sir,

Can anyone tell me why the reaction of six out of eight of my colleagues (general practitioners) to my telling them that I had become a Member of the Royal College of General Practitioners was "What on earth should you bother to do that for?"

I. D. KERR

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COMPUTERS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Sir,

I am collecting information about the use of computers by general practitioners and there may be cases where this information is not known by any central agency.

I would be grateful if any of your readers who are using a computer would be kind enough to let me have details.

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