

# National Conference of Postgraduate Advisers in General Practice

SINCE the last report of the Conference in the *Journal* the Conference has met in December 1975 and May 1976. It continues to serve a valuable purpose in airing the problems encountered in the day-to-day organization of postgraduate education for general practitioners by the advisers.

Topics discussed in the past year include the problem of the postgraduate qualifications of doctors appointed to single-handed practices, particularly those who, although vocationally trained, have had relatively little experience of general practice; the use of emergency relief services by teaching practices; and the recognition of overseas experience as being appropriate for vocational training.

Overshadowing all these issues has been the major problem of implementation of mandatory vocational training. Although the date of 1980 was agreed by the Annual Conference of Local Medical Committees at its 1975 meeting, the question of 'phasing' by the introduction of a mandatory year as a trainee at an earlier date has exercised advisers at both meetings, and in May 1976 they resolved that: 'This Conference reaffirms its readiness to implement a phased introduction of mandatory training for general practice and urges that the initial stage of one year mandatory traineeship be introduced forthwith.'

Other difficult problems that are arising include the possibility of a national clearing house for scheme and programme vacancies, the right of trainees to complete their training, and extended training for women doctors. Many of these issues will need discussion between representatives of the College, the Department of Health, and the General Medical Services Committee. Regional advisers are involved in making many decisions and recommendations about individuals and they have said that they would like to take part in discussions over the necessary regulations and guidelines involved.

## Organization

Closely linked with mandatory training is the problem of recognition of hospital posts for vocational training. The College's policy on criteria is emerging from prolonged debate in the faculties, as well as in council and, when promulgated, will be urged on the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice. This important committee includes representatives from the College, the conference of advisers, the General Medical Services Committee, and the postgraduate deans, and it is responsible for the quality of training programmes. Already it has nearly completed its first round of visits to regions, and reports of its early experience have excited much interest among

advisers and others concerned with the future of vocational training for general practice.

Although at present no formal assessment system is anticipated at the end of training, the examination for membership of the College is rapidly becoming generally accepted as an appropriate test, not only of the standard attained by trainees, but also of the training programmes in which they have participated.

No doctor who has completed training will be debarred from applying for a vacancy as an NHS principal; however, some will recognize their own needs for further training. For these as for 'late entrants'—doctors who have been away from medicine in general, or general practice in particular for various reasons—resources will be needed which may not be met by the present range of training options. The possibility of 'supervised assistantships' has therefore been canvassed as a mechanism for helping these doctors.

Since the last report there has been a major change in the method of financing Section 63 courses, and advisers are anxious to ensure that the expansion of courses for trainees does not lose momentum.

It is clear that there is a need for a radical review of the continuing education programme, with greater emphasis on more cost-effective methods of education for the established doctor, and the greater involvement of general practitioners in their own education. The advisers have recommended that this may best be achieved by a larger and more professional involvement of general practitioners in their own education in postgraduate medical centres, and they have made firm recommendations about this to the authorities concerned. These recommendations were adopted by the UK Conference after detailed studies and discussions by the advisers and associate advisers of England and Wales. The suggestions involve increasing the paid time of course organizers and expanding their roles to include continuing education.

Many doctors who have been vocationally trained in recent times wish to continue to educate themselves by the methods they have come to respect, and it is expected that greater provision of skilled general-practitioner teaching at district level will meet and encourage this demand. The recommendations made by the advisers are now being considered by the postgraduate deans, the health departments, and the General Medical Services Committee.

DOUGLAS PRICE  
*Secretary of the Conference*

## Reference

Price, D. (1975). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 25, 842-843.