

Medical Recording Service — twenty years-old

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THE month of June 1977 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Medical Recording Service, so we have been looking at old letters, committee minutes and records with a feeling of nostalgia. We remembered with gratitude our debt to Dr R. J. F. H. Pinsent, without whose encouragement and advice the Service would never have started.

John Graves was a foundation associate, and Valerie was a temporarily retired medical housewife bored with domesticity when in 1955 we asked the College if there was any work we could do. Dr Pinsent introduced us to Dr G. I. Watson, who needed help with coding cards from the Measles Survey. Later there was the College Questionary, an ambitious project designed to find out college members' characteristics, needs, and wishes. We wrote a series of articles in the *Research Newsletter* summarizing the replies: more important, we had access to names and addresses of many members who were dissatisfied with opportunities for keeping up to date. We had a ready-made panel of enthusiasts.

It is difficult for those who were not in general practice at that time to realize the frustration of general practitioners with hospital-oriented courses with their image (this was the time of the Collings report (1950) and Lord Moran's ladder), and their ambition to show that general practice was a discipline in its own right, worthy of research and detailed study. So many battles have been won, and perhaps some of the enthusiasm has been diverted into other channels. In 1956 it was waiting to be tapped.

In February 1957, encouraged by Dr Pinsent, we bought a tape-recorder and experimented with ways of using it for continuing education. An early recording was of a meeting on "Problems of Old Age", a joint College and BMA meeting at Ilford. We played the tape to local colleagues and nurses, who were fairly enthusiastic, but the sound quality was very poor and we realized that we must make recordings specially for

the purpose. A bacteriologist, Dr Roy Pilsworth, speaking at Chelmsford on "Virus Infections in General Practice", agreed to record his talk later for us, on 29 June 1957. We can regard this as the beginning of the Service: we had our first tape and our band of enthusiasts. Next we needed some backing.

Ever resourceful, Dr Pinsent found Mr R. A. Weeks of Smith, Kline and French Laboratories Ltd, who suggested gramophone records as well as tapes, and thought his firm might help. Dr George Swift, of the College Postgraduate Education Committee, helped to get a pilot project off the ground. Twenty-seven members took part: four (soft) LP disc copies and one tape copy were made and sent round to them. To save expense, they were divided into groups, the recording sent to the first, who sent it to the second, the last returning it to us—the 'listening circuits'. We wrote our first report about the idea in the *Research Newsletter* in December 1957, which was featured in the *Lancet* the following week.

Our guinea-pigs were enthusiastic, Smith, Kline and French were prepared to help, and further recordings were made. The first four circuit recordings were: The Scope of Psychiatry in General Practice, by Dr C. A. H. Watts; Medical Certificate of Causes of Death, by Dr J. D. Havard; Dermatitis and Eczema, by Dr J. R. Simpson; Treatment of Hypertension, by Dr Michael Hamilton. Others were made on anaemia, anxiety states, the failing heart, and on heart sounds, to be borrowed on request—the first library recordings. Most recordings were accompanied by slides.

The *British Medical Journal* asked us to write an article on the Service in the September 1958 educational number. This stimulated many more members to join listening circuits, and the library also grew rapidly. Circuit members invited colleagues to listen to the tapes with them and recorded comments on discussion tapes that were also circulated. By 1962 over 400 discussion groups were meeting regularly and we like to think that these were pressure groups that started other activities

such as postgraduate centre building. The circuits stopped in 1965.

In 1961 the lending service was made available to non-members for a small charge, at first chiefly to doctors in hospital, in public health, and those overseas, and later it was extended to include nurses, remedial therapists, students, and social workers. By 1965 5,000 loans a year were being made, almost entirely of tapes by now, rather than LP discs.

In 1970 the Service became a Foundation of the Royal College of General Practitioners—a registered charity providing a wide range of audiovisual education for use all over the world. Though still very much a part of the College, the growth of its projects outside general practice was faster than those for members. In 1974 a sub-group, MASPA (Medical Audiotape Slide Producers' Association) was co-ordinating tapes produced in medical schools for students, and the Service was working with, for example, the Association of Clinical Pathologists, the Royal College of Surgeons, and the British Orthopaedic Association. Though helped by occasional grants from the Department of Health and Social Security and others, the Service has had to be self-supporting.

Library loans grew to 10,000 in 1968, 15,000 in 1970, 20,000 in 1973, and 28,000 in 1975. This was a record year when medical schools all over the developing world were equipping themselves with audiovisual libraries. The year 1976 brought financial problems to everyone and the demand fell to 25,000 but it is beginning to rise again. We are happy to have taken the name of the Royal College of General Practitioners into so many corners of the world.

The Service started in the days when college committees met at the Society of Apothecaries in Blackfriars and all this time the Service has been run from our house and garden at Writtle. It has seen sweeping changes in the pattern of medical education and its twentieth anniversary will bring many more, among them a move to new premises and a new, equally rewarding, relationship with the College.

References

Collings, J. S. (1950). *Lancet*, i, 555-585.
Graves, J. C. & Graves, V. (1957). *Research Newsletter*, 4, 325.
Graves, J. C. & Graves, V. (1958). *British Medical Journal*, 2, 583-585.
Lancet (1957). ii, 1346.

See Editorial.



COLLEGE ACCOMMODATION

Charges for college accommodation are reduced for members (i.e. fellows, members and associates). Members of overseas colleges are welcome when rooms are available. All charges for accommodation include breakfast and are subject to VAT. A service charge of 12½ per cent is added. Members are reminded that children under the age of 12 years cannot be admitted and dogs are not allowed.

From 1 January 1977, charges are:

	Members	Others
Single room	£5	£9
Double room	£9	£14
Flat 1	£11 (£70 per week)	£14 (£90 per week)
Flat 3	£12 (£75 per week)	£15 (£95 per week)

Charges are also reduced for members hiring reception rooms compared with outside organisations which apply to hold meetings at the College. All hirings are subject to approval and VAT is added.

	Members	Others
Long room	£30	£40
Damask room	£20	£30
Common room and terrace	£20	£30
Kitchen	—	£10
Dining room	£10	£10

Enquiries should be addressed to:

**The Accommodation Secretary
The Royal College of General Practitioners
14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park
London SW7 1PU.
Tel: 01-584 6262**

Whenever possible bookings should be made well in advance.