

Silver jubilee

A TWENTY-FIFTH anniversary is a time for review, a time for re-examination. On 19 November 1952, in the hall of the Apothecaries' Society, London, the General-Practice Steering Committee handed over the challenge of building the College to the Foundation Council. Two thousand foundation members and associates supported the College by joining in the first year. We must now justify that trust and act of faith.

The *Lancet* (1951) in its editorial stated: "The profession as a whole is conscious that the most pressing need of the next five years is to sustain or revive general practice and to secure conditions in which it will flourish . . . There could hardly be a better moment, therefore, for reviving the demand of general practitioners for the kind of academic status and representation that has been so valuable to their colleagues in other branches of the profession . . ."

Today, we are profoundly grateful to the Foundation Council. When the opportunity of forming the College arose, they did not let it slip through their fingers, as had happened in 1845, when a previous attempt to form a college failed (McConaghey, 1972).

It is with special pleasure and pride that we share this twenty-fifth anniversary with Lord Hunt of Fawley who, as the first honorary secretary of the College Council, was its principal architect.

Among the highlights of the College's development was the granting of the royal prefix in 1967 and the decision by His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to be our President in 1972, and now our Patron. In this royal jubilee year the College is doubly grateful for his continuing interest.

It is impossible to analyse briefly all the influences, achievements, and failures in a history of 25 years. However, we are confident that the College's corporate existence is now assured. The very existence of general practice is no longer threatened and its academic content is firmly taking shape. Most medical students now receive some teaching about general practice and the general practitioners' place in the medical family is no longer denied.

It is now accepted that a career in general practice requires careful training and new entrants to general practice are undergoing increasingly better preparation for their task. Equally important is the need for teachers in general practice to undergo preparation, assessment,

and support. All members of the College accept that continuing education is a lifelong need and obligation. The increasing quality of both trainees and trainers gives us great hope for the future.

The membership examination, which is being taken by an ever-increasing number of applicants, is subject to constant critical analysis and research, and the College is ready to apply the lessons it learns, however unpalatable.

The research units of the College are gradually taking on the scientific role originally outlined by the Foundation Council, which could hardly have foreseen the rapidity of the development of the College's influence, particularly in the European and international fields.

But what of the patient? Has the quality of care been maintained and improved? All our efforts must be judged by this yardstick. The commitment to continuing education through the self-assessment packages, which are currently a feature of the college *Journal*, the obvious experiments in co-operation in inter-professional care, the shared care between the various professional branches—all these are pointers to the continuing search for competence to practise, with quality of care for the patient as the ultimate goal. In spite of the many difficulties facing us, we have not forgotten the College's motto, *Cum Scientia Caritas*.

The College was born out of the stresses and near destruction of general practice in the 1950s. We must therefore take heed that during another period of rapidly changing social structures, of changing medical ethos among some dissatisfied individuals, that we never forget that it is what each member personally puts into the College, particularly through the faculties, which will decide how far we achieve our aims.

We are immensely grateful to the many people who have served and cared for the College so well, whether at Princes Gate or in their home towns, in their practices or their academic departments, in committees or in working parties—wherever they have helped.

The task of establishing a college of general practitioners has been achieved. The challenge facing us now is to continue to raise the standards of care received by patients in the next 25 years.

References

Lancet (1951). Editorial, II, 1071.

McConaghey, R. M. S. (1972). *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 22, 775-788.