

trainees of at least two hours' individual teaching a week).

The most critical challenge for general practice now is the training of future general practitioners. Whatever the quality of day-release courses—and some are now very good indeed—the burden of responsibility and the main challenge for raising standards in the future lies in the competence, both as clinicians and as teachers, of the 1,100 trainers now appointed in the UK.

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## Professor P. S. Byrne

THIS month Professor P. S. Byrne retires from the post of Professor of General Practice at the University of Manchester after a most distinguished career.

He started winning awards early on in his career with a State Scholarship in 1930 and a Gold Medal in surgery in his final MB at Liverpool. Among his many notable academic achievements were his Pickles Lecture of 1968, the W. Victor Johnston Memorial Oration at the College of Family Physicians of Canada in 1971, and his chairmanship of the Working Party of the Second European Conference on the Teaching of General Practice (Leeuwenhorst) in 1974. He was the first general practitioner to deliver several named lectures, including the William Marsden Lecture in 1974 and the David Lloyd Hughes Memorial Lecture in 1975.

Other professional honours have included the Hippocratic Medal of the International Society of General Practice in 1973, Honorary Fellowship of the College of Medicine in South Africa (1975), an M.SC in Manchester (1976), and Honorary Membership of the College of Family Physicians of Canada in the same year. He was appointed OBE in 1966 and CBE six years later. Patrick Byrne will, however, remain best known for becoming the first Professor of General Practice in England.

In his professional career, he was first and foremost a general practitioner. After working in Westmoreland for 32 years and being a founder member of the College in 1952, he worked at the heart of Council throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He chaired the Education Committee for six years at a critical time in its development, was Vice-Chairman of Council in 1966, and Chairman of the Board of Censors and Chief Examiner from 1967 to 1973. He finally became President for the three years 1974 to 1976.

It may still be too early to appreciate fully the significance of his contribution to the discipline of general practice. It is, however, true to say that he has influenced the literature of general practice decisively.

On reaching his Chair he quickly pinpointed two specific weaknesses in general practice in the UK at that time. The first was the relative poverty of general-practice research and the consequent lack of respect for general practice as an academic discipline. Secondly, and far ahead of his time, he realized through his experience in the Education Committee of the College that general practice was about to embark on its biggest educational exercise of all time and that the profession was seriously unprepared for its new task. He reconciled these two needs by initiating a series of research projects in his Department at Manchester, concentrating particularly on educational research.

He was a member of the fourth working party which produced *The Future General Practitioner—Learning and Teaching*, and he was also co-author of *A Handbook of Medical Treatment* (1976) and *Textbook of Medical Practice* (1977).

His contributions to medical education have become known throughout the world. In 1976 he had a vintage year when second editions were published of *The Assessment of Postgraduate Training for General Practice*, which he had written with J. Freeman, and *Learning to Care*, which he had written jointly with B. E. L. Long and which was subsequently translated into Dutch, Spanish, and German. In the same year this *Journal* published in the *Reports from General Practice* series *The Assessment of Vocational Training for General Practice*. We commented then that this provided the first evidence of significant changes in trainees during vocational training and showed for the first time that personalities were being moulded.

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One of Professor Byrne's most recent books, however, is proving to be one of the most influential. *Doctors Talking to Patients*, written with his friend B. E. L. Long, was published by HMSO and it is a document of fundamental importance for general practice. Here for the first time is a scientific analysis of a multitude of real consultations in real general practice.

Twenty-five years ago Balint opened the door to the analysis of consultations using the perspective of the behavioural and especially the psychoanalytical sciences. Now Byrne is giving the study of the consultation in general practice a new dimension by changing the focus from theoretical speculation to objective analysis of what is actually recorded. Our discipline has not yet absorbed or worked through the consequences of this development—which will surely act as a springboard for new discoveries about the doctor-patient relationship.

With the retirement of Professor Byrne one of the most powerful personalities in British general practice moves out of office. He has been a dominant figure in the College and at Manchester for a decade. His penetrating ideas, political awareness, and speed in debate have always made him a formidable adversary and his earthy sense of humour and Irish wit have enlivened many a meeting. Throughout his career he has been greatly supported by his wife, Kathleen, who has remained in full-time general practice. We wish them both a happy and active retirement.

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## Dangers of dilution of topical steroids

... In conclusion, therefore, all the above considerations contraindicate interfering with well researched products by dilution. The preferred alternative is to choose from the range available—those of a proven and reliable performance, suitable for the particular type and severity of skin condition.

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