

# The nurturing of a medical journal

A favourite phrase of Aneurin Bevan's was "politics not personalities". The same will be true of this *Journal* but, before we begin, let there be one more look at a personality—Dr Denis Pereira Gray. He moved to the editorial chair in 1972, after a year as deputy editor and two years on the board of the first editor, Dr R. M. S. McConaghey, and from the outset made plain his determination to continue building up an academic journal of general practice. He argued that any clinical discipline must establish its own research base, define its own area of competence and establish its own standards. His aim has therefore been to publish few review papers, but much original work from, about, and of interest to general practice. Not only general practitioners, but also a growing number of hospital specialists, educationalists, psychologists, sociologists and other scientists have gladly submitted their work to his pages.

During the ten years of his editorship, vocational training for general practice has grown from a tiny infant into a child that at times seems to take up almost all the energy of its parents. It is therefore not surprising that Gray chose so many papers about education for the *Journal*, nor that his last issue (December 1980) should have education as its theme. Having decided to print original papers, he was always able to choose only from what was submitted, and if the leading edge of general practice appeared to be deflected for a time away from clinical research into descriptions of educational method, then we can assume that the best research in general practice was often going on in the field of education. The importance of behavioural medicine to Gray has been reflected not only by his choice of original papers (for example the four major papers in the *Journal* in June 1979) and in his choice of editorials (for example "Difficulties with dependency", October 1980), but in the way he himself practises medicine, giving care which is professional, skilful, non-directive and personal (Gray, 1979a).

Above all, Gray enjoys challenge: although the position of editor exposed him to criticism, often virulent and sometimes quite unjustified, he has never stooped to angry dismissal of his critics, nor to that peculiarly infuriating habit of some editors of printing their own rebuttals to their critics—getting the last word is not the Gray method. Early on in his time as editor he published a paper by Honigsbaum (1972) which promised to be a second Collings report (1950); highly critical—in massive detail—of general practitioners' standards, it offended many inside and outside the College and gave rise to articles in the national press which were extremely uncomplimentary to general practice. This was the archetypal Gray challenge: state a case, give the evidence, and then discuss it.

Another of Gray's major editorial achievements was to launch, in 1976, the *Journal Occasional Papers*, now numbering 14 and with several more in press. This series allows the *Journal* to publish much longer papers than can be contained in the body of the monthly publication of 64 pages, and its success has proved another of Gray's theses, that general practitioners will spend money on books.

In 1977 a change of publisher for the *Journal* became necessary, and Gray wrote a series of masterly position papers setting out the evidence which the College's negotiating team used to enter into a contract with Update Publications. The present style and format owe much to his skill in making quick decisions and working with a new group of advertising and publishing professionals.

Anyone (this editor in particular), would think that editing a major medical journal was, along with being a principal in general practice with his father, quite enough for one person, but during the 1970s Gray was also appointed senior lecturer-in-charge of the only department of general practice in Britain outside a medical school, as well as regional adviser in general practice in the South Western region. He sat on the Lane Committee, which reviewed the workings of the Abortion Act, wrote chapters in books on paediatrics and practice management, including the best-selling Occasional Paper of them all, *A System of Training for General Practice* (Pereira Gray, 1979b), and played a major part in many debates in College Council.

Lest all this sound a little obituarial, it is only fair to say that Denis Pereira Gray is still alive and well, looking only a little older than he did in 1971, and the same open, friendly and critical man as ever. Whatever will he and his wife Jill, who for the past five years has given him immeasurably valuable help as assistant editor, do next?

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## References

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