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## WHY NOT?

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# Why not form your own local College group?

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**A**RE you dissatisfied with College activities in your area? Do you feel ignored by your Faculty? Are you dissatisfied with continuing education in your area? Then why not do something about it?

For some time the College has been earnestly debating its future. Having successfully developed undergraduate and vocational training, in general there seems to be a strong body of opinion in favour of concentrating on continuing education for those of us who are already in practice. Few would doubt that the need for continuing education exists and our own experience suggests that this need is to some extent unmet.

Since we shared the ideals of the College we fully expected to find, on completing vocational training and entering our own practices, that the College would help us in achieving these ideals and in meeting others who share them. This quickly became a forlorn hope as it became obvious that College activities in our locality were non-existent. There were meetings at faculty level certainly, but our faculty covers a large area and meetings are often held in distant parts. The only answer seemed to be to try to contact local College members ourselves and discover if they shared our views. We describe what happened in the hope that it will stimulate others to do the same and encourage faculty boards to play their part.

We began by obtaining a list of all College members in the district from our College tutor. The list was woefully out of date and we have had to revise it gradually. The Postgraduate Centre Secretary agreed to circulate the members with an invitation to a meeting at which the Faculty Provost talked about his experiences on the Royal Commission on the National Health Service. At that first meeting in the Postgraduate Centre only 10 people out of a possible 50 were present, but it was enjoyed by all who attended and we decided to hold meetings every two months and, as an experiment, to

take it in turns to be host, holding the meetings in our own surgeries, choosing and introducing the topics ourselves.

The meetings have provided us with an opportunity to find out how other like-minded doctors tackle problems common to all of us; indeed the thing we learnt was that we do seem to find the same problems difficult and have a variety of interesting ways of trying to solve them. We are constantly amazed at the good ideas that our colleagues have. Topics chosen for the meetings are as often administrative or medicopolitical as clinical, and the meetings are characterized by enthusiasm and the enormous interest we get from our practices. The attendance has gradually increased over the last two years to average about 15 and we suspect that 20 is the maximum viable number for a group of this nature. The most regular attenders are young doctors, who seem to regard the group as a logical extension of vocational training, but there are also some more established general practitioners and the occasional doctor who is not a College member.

Within the group there is a strong sense of confidence in our ability to provide some of our own education and to plan it ourselves and to be involved in the functioning of the College. To these ends we hope to get some of our group members accepted to serve on the Faculty Board and on the local postgraduate medical education committee. On discussing the activities of groups such as ours with people from other areas, we have formed the impression that many groups are quite formal and dull, that there is often a sense of inferiority and a feeling that general practitioners should be taught by people who know more than they do (that is, specialists). Perhaps because our group contains a lot of recent ex-trainees, there is no lack of confidence. On occasions when specialists have attended they have played a secondary role and have been consulted as and when necessary.

Above all it is fun—why not have a go?