

Trainees and the College

DURING most of the 1960s and 1970s the College pursued the target of vocational training as its highest priority and it was only after legislation was introduced that the College switched its emphasis to continuing medical education. The College is thus absolutely committed to vocational training both in principle and in practice. It has always welcomed vocational trainees as Associates and indeed the associate subscription rate, which is tax allowable, is only £20.00 a year. For this sum associate members receive a personal copy of the College's *Journal*, use of all the services, including the library and photocopying, accommodation at Princes Gate and all the notices of central and local meetings. It is surprising that hundreds of trainees have not joined the College and that so many are unaware of their right to do so.

Discussion with trainees and their representatives has highlighted part of the problem. Some trainees think of the College as a powerful member of the Establishment consisting mainly of older doctors whose main function is to organize and set an examination. The facts are rather different. Over a third of the members of the College are under the age of 40 and about two thirds have joined by examination. There are now places for two trainee observers on Council (at present Dr Michael Mead of Leicester and Dr Maureen Reynolds of Severn Faculty) and the College has always nominated a trainee as one of its representatives on the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (Dr Michael Mead).

Nevertheless, beliefs can influence action regardless of their basis. The profound ignorance of the College amongst hundreds of today's trainees stands as a major challenge to all those who care about the College and its future. The failure to inform every trainee of the simple fact that the College welcomes trainee Associates and is bending over backwards to welcome them must be faced.

The first responsibility falls fairly and squarely on Faculty Boards. From every point of view, not least that of the trainees themselves, it is right to welcome them now and encourage them to come to the professional, educational and social meetings held by local faculties, to join faculty members in tackling some of the interesting issues of the day, and to work with them as friends

and colleagues in the faculty committees. The few faculties which have already ensured trainee representation are extremely pleased with the results, but Ronalds and her colleagues in the recent *Occasional Paper 18, Fourth National Trainee Conference* (Table R27) show how little most trainees knew in 1980 about trainee representation on the faculties.

Whilst it is true that the modern concept of education rests on the idea of a partnership between two adults, nevertheless in situations such as this somebody has to take the initiative. Some faculties have proved that trainees will join in substantial numbers if they are really welcomed. The onus now lies on every faculty of the College to make contact with all its local trainees; every new trainee is surely entitled at least to a letter of welcome. At least once a year someone should speak to all the trainees in each region and repeat clearly and unequivocally the College's welcome. Regional trainee meetings provide a particularly suitable opportunity.

Personal example and personal encouragement, however, may in the long run prove more important. Every trainee has a trainer and about two thirds of all trainers are themselves College members (Ronalds *et al.*, 1981). Trainees are always much influenced by the personal example of their trainers, and perhaps the most important influence of all will be the trainer explaining why he or she is a member, why it matters to him or her, and positively encouraging the trainee to join as well. Those who go to the Spring and Annual General Meetings enjoy these occasions when they can meet old friends and make new ones. Some trainers take the opportunity to go with their trainee—could this pleasant habit not be more widely copied?

The College welcomes trainees as associate members and hopes that they will play an active part in its work in the future.

D. J. PEREIRA GRAY
General Practitioner, Exeter

Reference

- Ronalds, C.M., Douglas, A., Pereira Gray, D.J. *et al.* (1981). *Fourth National Trainee Conference, Occasional Paper 18*. London: Royal College of General Practitioners.