

Wasted opportunities

While recognizing that the Modified Essay Question is designed to test clinical judgement, I believe that the timing of the examination has a counterproductive effect and wastes that potential of the trainee year. The prospect of an examination inevitably encourages doctors to perpetuate their previous habits of narrowing their minds onto a syllabus, real or imagined, instead of encouraging them, perhaps for the first time in their medical lives, to move their eyes off hard facts and onto the more intangible nature of people as well as their own personal growth.

Why waste the opportunities offered by the trainee year? Any doctor who passes the MB examination can, if he applies himself, learn up a few facts, whether it is at the end of the trainee year or after two years as a principal. It may be more difficult later, but is that a reason for not doing it then? The contribution to sound clinical judgement from knowledge requires continuous updating of facts, not a once-and-for-all swot. The personal development in that trainee year could reasonably be hoped to include a desire and technique for keeping up-to-date, rather than time spent preparing for an examination.

The argument that the examination is a powerful tool to control the content of vocational training does not require that it be held at the end of vocational training. On the contrary, if it were held two years later everyone could judge whether or not the training received had been appropriate.

How unfortunate for so young a College that it is engendering in trainees precisely the opposite attitudes to those

which it hopes to encourage, foster and maintain. Most trainees see it as an expensive examining body and many see it as trying to press young doctors into a mould.

Are these the reasons?

When I try to rationalize my unrest I arrive at these reasons: The examination remains timed at the end of vocational training because this is intellectually tidy, and because leaving loose ends to such unassessable subjects as personal growth and diversity of approach induces stress symptoms in those who feel a responsibility for the medical profession's standards. Also, and more seriously, there is a fear that if the examination is moved, then fewer doctors will sit it and the College will consequently lose money.

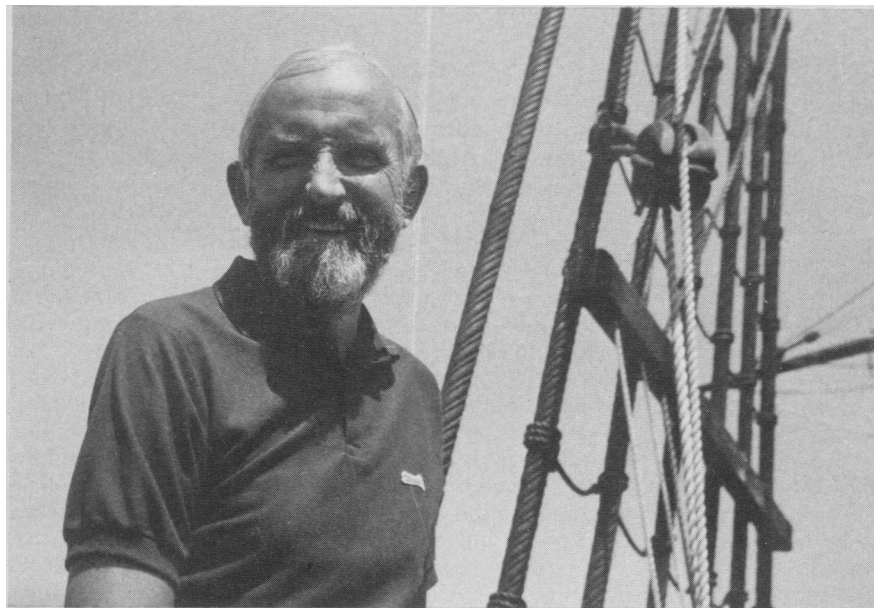
Since I do not like the implications of my own reasoning, I would be grateful if somebody responsible could refute these points and explain the real purpose of the timing of the MRCCP examination.

References

- Bond, T. et al (1982). MRCCP examination. *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 32, 642.
- Bradley, N. C. A. (1982). Sixth National Trainee Conference report. *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 32, 580.
- Charles, HRH Prince of Wales (1982). *British Medical Journal*. 150th Anniversary Issue, p.1.
- Griffiths, T. N. (1981). Membership. *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 31, 697.
- Taylor, G. B. (1982). Trainees and the College. *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 32, 454.

LETTERS

How Should We Remember John Stevens?



Sir,
Over a year has now passed since John Stevens sailed from Panama into the Pacific to continue his single-handed world voyage. He had already crossed the Atlantic; a truly remarkable feat for a man seriously handicapped by a

severe stroke. Since he left Panama there has been no news of him, and the likelihood must now be that he has been lost at sea. That is a great sadness to his family, and to his many, many friends. But if it has to be a time to accept his loss, it is also a time to

honour his memory, his qualities and achievements. We remember him for his extraordinary energy and enthusiasm, his loyalty to his friends, his articulate anger and his leaping wit; and surely also for us his friends, his moments of outrageous and gut-convulsing clowning. All these gifts he shared with us and gave to the causes he served so well. He had a truly original mind, and his contributions to general practice and to the work of the College were richly creative.

It was a personal loss for many when his stroke, now over four years ago, robbed us of his unique brand of leadership. How to remember him well must now be our concern. It seems appropriate that his many friends and admirers in the College should have an opportunity to share their thoughts on this subject at this stage. This could be done publicly by replies to this letter sent to the *Journal*, or by personal letters to me. Out of such correspondence will come, I am sure, ideas that will help the College to decide how best to salute his memory.

IAN TAIT

45 Park Road
Aldeburgh
Suffolk.