

FROM THE FACULTIES

Annual study day for overseas graduates

Dr Bashir Qureshi reports on the seventh of these MRCGP study days, arranged by the North and West London Faculty and held at the College on 11 February.

One fifth of all practising general practitioners in the UK are overseas graduates, and they look after about ten million British patients. Only a handful of these doctors have been able to pass the MRCGP examination in past years. The high standard of this examination is essential for good patient care. If an overseas-trained doctor could be brought up to this standard by further education, it would be a great service to British patients. After all, the College aims for the continuing education of all general practitioners and its examination is an expression of that aim.

THE North and West London Faculty was the first to be aware of this situation. Its education committee runs courses for all general practitioners and also for groups needing special attention. In keeping with this policy, the annual study days for overseas graduates were begun. This year's study day was heavily over-subscribed with more than 200 applicants. The original maximum of 100 candidates had to be raised to 110, although 90 actually attended. The thirteen tutors included nine examiners, three faculty members and one English language teacher. The examiners were Andrew

Bailey, John Cohen, John Lee (Chairman of the Membership Division), Michael Lee-Jones, Cameron Lockie, Bill Marson, Peter Mukherji, Lotte Newman and John Toby. The faculty members were George Melotte, Jayant Thakkar and myself, and the English teacher was John Clegg. This strong team was well equipped to deal with all aspects of the cultural and educational problems facing overseas graduates preparing for the MRCGP examination.

The syllabus consisted of work in small groups covering various parts of the examination, especially the particular problems encountered by over-

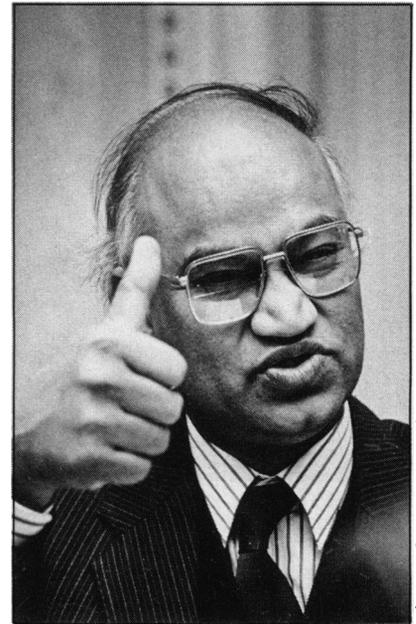


Photo: Current Practice

Dr Qureshi makes a cross-cultural point. 'Thumbs up' is a rude gesture to Belgian, Asian and Greek doctors: examiners and hitch-hikers beware!

seas graduates. Talks given by examiners and teachers covered not only the examination and general practice but also an introduction to the College and the problems of finding jobs in general practice. The quality of care for these general practitioners was considered as important as the quality of care in general practice.

The rapport between the examiners and the candidates was so good that the organizer had a job to break up these small groups in order to start the final session of discussion by all the participants. At this session and in the 67 questionnaires returned, the candidates asked for repeated, extended and frequent study days of this type. Although the problem was identified by our faculty, we recognize that this is a national issue and that there is a need for other faculties to hold such courses in their postgraduate centres.

An analysis of attendance showed that most of the candidates were already principals. There were some trainees and a handful of locums, and there was one English trainer who attended this course for the purpose of teaching his trainees who were overseas doctors. There were no hospital doctors, all those attending being general practitioners. This reveals the College's responsibility to elevate and maintain educational standards among

Faculty secretaries' workshop

The first of what is intended to be a series of faculty secretaries' workshops was held at the College on 14 February. The College's Honorary Secretary, Dr Bill Styles, who chaired the meeting, said it was very successful—dealing with a wide range of subjects including faculty development and the Quality Initiative.



Photo: Dan Crowley

Some of the faculty secretaries attending the meeting with Bill Styles (Honorary Secretary) and Sally Fountain (General Administrator).

all general practitioners.

These study days are unique in three respects. Firstly, the candidates are able to discuss their educational and cultural difficulties directly with the College examiners, and benefit from their advice. This contact has already raised the pass percentage of these candidates in the past two years. Secondly, the examiners are able to reas-

sure the candidates that there is no colour prejudice in the examination, as they might have believed. This College aims at membership by inclusion and not by exclusion. The scientific thinking of the College is explained along with the organizer's advice on the finer points of the cultural differences which are a barrier for borderline candidates. Finally, the English partici-

pants can understand the overseas graduates' viewpoints and appreciate their determination to become better general practitioners to serve their patients. Specific problems are identified and ways of dealing with them are established, and there is a genuine hope for everyone concerned to look forward to a better future in general practice.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

A dream in winter

Dr Graham Buckley reports on the first international meeting of the Portuguese Association of General Practice held at Evora, Portugal from 19 to 21 January 1984.

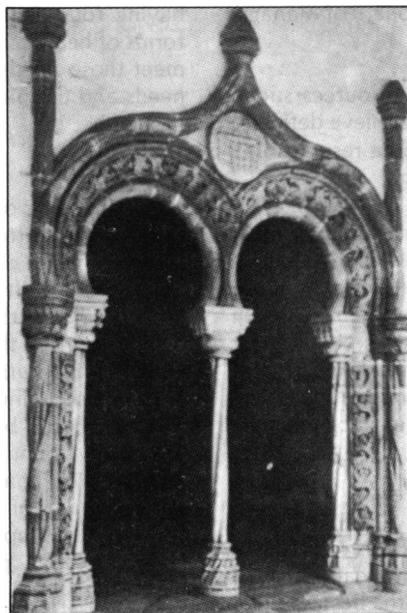
One of the privileges of the Editor of the *Journal* is the occasional invitation to travel. Southern Portugal seemed the right kind of place to be in winter, and it fully lived up to expectations. There was a dreamlike quality in leaving snowbound Scotland one morning, passing through the surreal surroundings of Gatwick Airport—where I met up with Dr John Horder and Professor John Bain—and landing in the early afternoon in Lisbon to be greeted by a mild sea breeze and a friendly Portuguese welcome. The feeling of being detached in time and space was enhanced by the organ music played by Dr Horder who successfully continued his pursuit of playing church organs in all the capitals of Europe.

OUR host's charming disregard of time was combined with impressive efficiency in arranging simultaneous translation of Portuguese and English throughout the whole meeting.

The venue was the small and attractive town of Evora, just south-east of Lisbon. This walled town is full of sixteenth-century colleges, palaces and monasteries which provided the halls and accommodation for the meeting.

The Portuguese Association of General Practice is only one year old and had decided to invite general practitioners from all over Europe to this first international meeting. The members wished to compare their emerging system of general practice with the systems operating in other countries and, by so doing, to define the path they themselves wish to follow. The meeting attracted 300 young and enthusiastic general practitioners, and its importance was confirmed by the attendance of the Minister of Health who spoke at the final session. It is evident from his contribution, and from the whole atmosphere of the meeting, that there is strong support for the rapid development of general practice in Portugal.

Speakers from other European coun-



Sixteenth century Moorish arch in Evora.

tries, while willing to describe their own systems and methods of work, emphasized the importance of cultural and medical traditions and encouraged the Portuguese doctors to create their own style of general practice. Professor Bain, in particular, drew attention

to the need for a strong research foundation upon which to build general practice.

The value of the meeting will have to be measured by the growth and development of the Portuguese Association. It was certainly exciting to be present and to participate in the early stages of what we hope will become a vigorous academic body. Although many problems lie ahead for general practice in Portugal, not least the meagreness of the resources available, the doctors at the meeting did appear to be clear about the way in which they would like to see medicine develop.

When the plane landed back at Edinburgh Airport where it was still snowing my own fantasies, visions and dreams also came down to earth as I faced the prospect of a Monday morning surgery. Next stop Inverness.

Balint workshop in Sweden

In Umeå, Sweden, a second national workshop on Balint groups was held on 10 and 11 February 1984. There is an increasing interest in Sweden, especially among young general practitioners, in Balint's work.

Dr Michael Courtenay, general practitioner and senior lecturer at St Thomas' Hospital London, was invited as a special guest. He spoke about the history and development of Balint's work as well as leading one of the groups. Professor Lennart Kaij of the Department of Psychiatry Malmö who has stimulated general practitioners in Sweden to undertake this type of work was one who initiated the meeting.

The meeting was organized by Dr Bengt Mattsson at the Department of General Practice, University of Umeå.

More than 40 people attended the meeting, mostly general practitioners, but some psychiatrists and psychologists were also present. There will be a meeting next year in Stockholm.