

Editorials

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND THE CRITERIA INQUIRY

THE Council of the College has set up a working party to consider how the College can organize, and help others to organize, vocational training for general practice; it has already published a preliminary report. The period recommended in the report as the minimum needed to train for independent practice is in very close agreement with the corporate opinion of the College as expressed in the results of the postal inquiry into possible educational criteria for membership. The results of the inquiry suggest a total of three years and nine months after registration, to which must be added the pre-registration period of one year. In recommending five years from the time of qualification for this training, the working party was considering the changes and developments which should occur during the next ten years or more: the training should be so arranged that at the end of it the young graduate should be competent in the total field of general practice.

In those parts of the world in which the system of personal or family medical care continues or develops, this is the way in which training is likely to develop, because it is gradually becoming more widely recognized that general practice, no less than the specialities, needs special training and experience beyond the legal requirements for registration. In 1963 an expert committee of the World Health Organization, with members drawn from both hemispheres, recommended that in order to raise the standards of family practice all graduates who choose family medicine as their future work should undergo a period of postgraduate study and preparation specially designed to meet their needs in this field of medicine. The Australian College of General Practitioners recommends a five-year period of special training and has plans to implement its recommendations; in Israel a four-year training programme to follow one year of rotating internships is to be put into effect; and the International Conference on General Practice held in Montreal in 1964 produced examples from other countries in which similar planning was being undertaken.

In our present thinking we are following rather than leading world opinion, but if the College has seemed to lag in promoting systematized training this may be because the climate of opinion here has not been ready for it. We believe that the time has now come for us

to make our opinions widely known and for us to lead the way in organizing, and helping others to organize, vocational training for general practice as vigorously as possible. Experiments have already been carried out in vocational training in London and Wessex; a plan of training for general practice has been started in Bristol; and Lancaster and Tyneside among other places are formulating ideas. The College influenced the General Medical Services Committee report on the trainee scheme in an attempt to put this on a realistic footing. All these schemes are being watched with interest by medical schools and medical educationalists. Perhaps we have been wise in acting cannily and allowing ideas to germinate and crystalize.

The College at its annual general meeting has voted unanimously in favour of the need for vocational training for general practice and the way is now open for the College through its working party to weld the results of the various experiments into firm recommendations that will give a strong lead to medical schools and our own faculties throughout the country. The general acceptance and implementation of these standards of pre-practice education will do more to improve the standing, as well as the contentment, of general practitioners than all the alterations of the terms of service and remuneration now being discussed, and will inevitably lead to much improved standards of medical care for the British people.

THE COLLEGE APPEAL

THE second phase of the College Appeal is well under way, and through their faculty boards all members will have heard something of our plans for the future. One principle which every member will understand is that it must be clearly seen that we are doing all we can to help ourselves before we ask for help from others. It is surprising what can be achieved when anyone determines to do all he can to further some object of which he feels strongly, particularly if it is concerned with the general good of the community.

During the next six months the College will make a great effort to put its two major activities, education and research, on a sound financial footing. The success so far achieved is mainly due to the generous support given to the appeal by trusts and industry; members of the College gave little more than ten per cent of the total figure. Before a second approach can be made to industry and others, that a major effort should come from the faculty members themselves, whose interests, and those of general practitioners everywhere, depend upon a successful outcome to this appeal.