

Conflict between theory and practice

Once more there is a conflict between Town and Gown! Cowan reports on his findings from his practice which seem to be supported by a certain amount of theoretical and a large amount of practical evidence¹. Smith and Jordaan write their response from academia in this issue.

I frequently find myself in conversations where it is assumed that all academic activity, all development of theory, all teaching and rational thought come from tertiary care institutions. Conversely, those who then have to practice all this, find themselves outside of these institutions. This seems to be the assumption that operates on both sides of the divide. Many tertiary care consultants and general practitioners speak and behave as if this is true even if they deny it when challenged.

This, of course, is patently untrue. Not many people will stand up in public to defend it. One of the fathers of cardiology, McKenzie², left academia to go back to general practice as he thought that it was the only place one could do real research. Where observation rather than armchair work was the basis of theory.

I am not trying to say that Cowan will prove right in the long run. It would be nice, however, if he was taken more seriously so that some rational dialogue and experiment can follow, if necessary.

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References

1. Cowan D. Experience in the Treatment of Skin Conditions caused by Skin Lighteners. SAfr Fam Pract 1990;11:223-9.
2. Wilson R. M. The Beloved Physician, Sir James MacKenzie. London: John Murray, 1926.