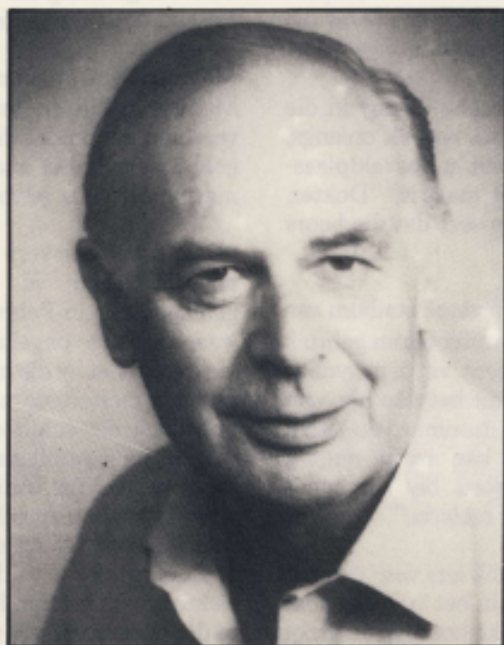


Vocational Training Column



by Dr John Smith

The historical development of vocational training for general practice in Britain

Pereira Gray¹ from Exeter sketches this development in an Occasional Paper entitled *"A System of Training for General Practice"* as follows:

Rosemary Stevens (1966) has analysed with great perception the history and development of general practice and attitudes to training. She traces the early struggles for professional independence back to the days of the apothecaries and shows that one crucial criterion of independence is responsibility for training the next generation.

In an address to the Danish College of General Practitioners in Copenhagen in May 1976, I suggested a new analogy between general practitioners and specialists which helps to explain why some specialists have been reluctant to encourage postgraduate training for general practice.

I suggested that the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons were parent figures. As a result of their 'marriage' came the MRCS LRCP diploma, and the general practitioner was born. The generalist was thus cast in the role of child and pupil of the specialist, who in the parent role was unprepared for him to grow up educationally.

The historical consequence was that for over 100 years (1850-1960) more than half the medical graduates in the British Isles entered general practice having experienced an undergraduate training quite inappropriate for their life's work. Worse still, the message from the medical schools, both implicitly and explicitly, was that the best of medicine was practised in hospitals and the best of all in teaching hospitals. The need for postgraduate training for general practice was never recognised for the simple reason that general practice was not regarded as a discipline in its own right, which is still the case in parts of Europe today.

The great increase of medical knowledge in the first half of the twentieth century, coupled with increasing fragmentation of the specialties, led to the generalist approach among hospital physicians being increasingly eroded. Meanwhile the kind of patients in teaching hospital beds became less and less representative of those seen in general practice; the training needed for postgraduates in the specialties increasingly diverged from that needed in family practice. An explosion was inevitable: the question was only when it would occur.

In 1950 the British Medical Association, to its great credit, published the Cohen Committee Report, which suggested

that there was a need for three years' specific vocational training for general practice. Coming at the midpoint of the twentieth century this is now seen clearly as a historic landmark charting the course of today's developments. By 1952 morale in general practice was at such a low ebb that the College of General Practitioners had to be formed in secret because of specialist opposition (Hunt, 1973)! I recently suggested in an editorial that historians will see this as a unilateral declaration of academic independence (*Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners, 1975c*).

Those who now look with admiration or envy at the recent success of postgraduate training for general practice

should not forget the pain of the past. What other profession has had an undergraduate programme lasting for many years dominated and controlled for over a century by people who neither practised nor believed in the job itself?

In 1965 the new College of General Practitioners nailed its colours to the mast and published *Special Vocational Training for General Practice*, the first of its *Reports from General Practice*. This evidence was then submitted to the Royal Commission on Medical Education, which in 1968 endorsed it almost completely.

Reference: Percin Gray DJ. A System of Training for General Practice. 2nd ed. London: Royal College of General Practitioners, 1979 (Occasional Paper 4).

Vocational Training Scheme News

On 13 March 1985, Sterling Winthrop hosted the official opening of the Vocational Training Scheme for Family Practice/Primary Care in Durban. This is only the beginning of a big future development, said Dr Hackland, The Secretary for Health for KwaZulu.

The Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care has launched the scheme jointly with the KwaZulu Government that has provided the necessary training posts for the venture. Dr Basil Jaffe, the President of the Academy and Dr J Smith, the National Co-ordinating Director for Vocational Training, both replied to his address. Their talks will be reproduced in our next issue.



Dr Fred Clark, the Exco MPC for Hospital Services, Natal and Dr Margaret Barlow, the President of the Natal Coastal Branch of MASA and Superintendent of Addington Hospital



(L to R): Dr John Smith, National Coordinating Director, Vocational Training; Dr Garth Brink, Regional Coordinator Vocational Training, Natal; Mr Terry Edwards, Marketing Manager, Winthrop; Dr Bruce Sparks, National Secretary of the Academy; Dr Basil Jaffe, President of the Academy; and Dr Darryl Hackland, Secretary for Health and Welfare.



(L to R): Dr René le Roux, President of MASA, with Dr Syd Mobbs, local course organiser in Pietermaritzburg.