

EDITORIAL

COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS SINGAPORE

In the past two decades the accent had been on the training of specialists in Singapore. In the last decade there has been a growing restlessness among the more enlightened general practitioners to raise the standard of general practise in Singapore. It was not until 1969 that the S.M.A. appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Koh Eng Kheng to look into the possibility of forming a higher academic body for general practitioners. After meeting for half a dozen times, the committee decided that it was time such a body was formed. However, they were unable at this stage to recommend forming an independent college or be a chapter of the Academy of Medicine. Two events helped to make up their minds. Firstly, the constitution of the Academy of Medicine could not allow for the formation of a chapter of "General practitioners" as another group of "Specialists." Secondly, the Society of Private Practice at their 1970 AGM passed a resolution "to form a local body of general practitioners similar to the Royal College of General Practitioners of England or the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners." A committee was formed near the end of 1970 to draft the constitution of this new college. Its chairman was Dr. Wong Heck Sing. When the constitution was finally drafted in March 1971, an inaugural meeting was held on 29th March 1971 and its first council was appointed. Dr. B. R. Sreenivasan was its first president, and the College of General Practitioners was duly registered on 30th June 1971.

Having formed the College, this group of dedicated men went ahead with the primary aim of raising the standards of general practitioners. This took the form of regular clinical meetings, lectures and group discussions at the rate of two sessions per week. The crowning glory of this pioneer group took shape in the form of the first College Examination in November 1972. Five external examiners were invited to this examination: two from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, and three physicians from Singapore and Malaysia. The College of General Practitioners contributed three of their own internal examiners. The high standard of the examination was insisted on by Dr. Wong Kum Hoong, the Censor-in-Chief, and only 7 out of 17 candidates passed the examination. All the external examiners were favourably impressed by the high standards of the examination.

The above is a short account of the formation and intense activity of the College of General Practitioners Singapore (CGPS). The activists in the College must be congratulated for what they have achieved in 18 months. It is quite useless to discuss here whether, these "new general practitioners" should be called "specialists" in their own right or not. It is more important to know that the "family physician" is better equipped to tackle the problems of general practice. It has also been difficult to choose a name for this new breed of general practitioners e.g. "family doctor," "family physician", "personal physician", "doctor of first call", or "general physician." Whatever, they are called, the "family physician" is said "to provide primary comprehensive and continuing total patient care to individuals and families and those with whom they interact."

Up to now, no one in their right mind would quarrel with what the new college has done. They have now spelt out their plans for the future and they are: (1) to create a Department of General Practice in the Faculty of Medicine, and (2) to have a 5-year period of vocational training for post-graduates.

Anybody who has had several years of general practice would confirm that the present system of undergraduate training in the University does not prepare him for general practice. A department of general practice in the faculty of medicine is therefore not only very necessary, but it is too long overdue. The 5-year vocational post-graduate training could be argued to be too long if the trainee is not allowed to earn a living at the same time. The details of this vocational training appear to be accommodating this particular aspect of the trainee. If this is so, then it again should be encouraged. The last question one would like to ask is will the future college examinations be opened only to those who have undergone the 5-year vocational training. If the answer is in the affirmative, then let us at least make a plea for the continuance of the bi-weekly teaching sessions for the busy general practitioner, who may not want to sit for the diploma examination, but who merely wants to improve himself and keep abreast of the latest developments. These are the other breed of general practitioners that should be equally admired and encouraged.

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