Middle Articles

A Greenock Family Doctor Looks Back Seven Years

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After five years' hospital service and one year as a trainee assistant in general practice, I decided, at the age of 35, to put "my plate up" in the Larkfield district of Greenock, Renfrewshire, three miles from the town centre.

A temporary surgery was built and proved sufficient for the first five years. It was sectional, wooden, cost about £550, and was paid for in cash. Home was a rented furnished house for the first 18 months, and for the five years after that it was a small bought bungalow. It can fairly be said that the doctor and his wife and daughter lived modestly.

Growth of Practice

The steady increase in the practice is shown in Table I.

TABLE I.—Growth in Numbers of Patients Since Practice Started on 1 July 1957

Patients	Period to 1 April						
	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Additions	225	529	501	349	431	535	341
Deductions	1	11	52	78	121	107	142
Total	224	742	1,191	1,462	1,772	2,200	2,399

A large number of patients have emigrated. Many have gone South in search of employment. A few have gone to other doctors, and a few have died.

Income

The gross income for seven years is shown in Table II.

TABLE II.—Gross Income for Seven Years to 30 June 1964

Source of Income	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Capitation	£58	£467	£945	£1,304	£1,612	£2,008	£2,459
Loading	—	52	330	615	827	850	952
Temporary residents ..	—	23	46	54	43	71	50
Supplementary	—	—	117	396	43	—	—
Maternity	1	87	142	381	411	500	428
Mileage	—	3	15	33	40	44	75
Initial practice allowance ..	516	632	362	81	—	—	—
Locum fees	130	—	—	—	—	—	—
Central pool	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Notification, private fees, etc.	16	1	13	12	34	20	28
Gross income	721	1,266	1,970	2,876	3,010	3,493	3,992

Locum fees of £130 were earned while the temporary surgery was being erected. I worked in five different practices as a locum, including the Highlands and Islands, and the experience was invaluable in running my own practice later. In more recent years the income includes that from a small number of patients from a neighbouring county.

Expenditure

My expenditure for seven years up to 30 June 1964 is shown in Table III.

Surgery.—The photograph shows a simple brick building 24 ft. by 18 ft.; it is twice the width of the former wooden surgery. The total cost, including ground and road charges,

TABLE III.—Expenditure for Seven Years to 30 June 1964

	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Rent of ground for surgery ..	£9	£12	£12	£12	£12	£4	£64
Rates	14	19	20	22	4	30	41
Insurance	—	3	3	3	3	3	7
Heat and light	30	39	26	38	36	40	42
Telephone	33	45	53	52	43	71	55
Repairs and renewals:							
Surgery	35	10	15	22	23	115	63
Instruments	9	6	3	3	—	—	—
Drugs, dressings, etc.	8	13	26	17	21	19	25
Stationery, postage	14	14	19	20	28	29	29
Periodicals, textbooks	7	8	9	53	69	66	86
Cleaning materials, wages, etc.	100	179	195	242	242	222	194
Motor expenses	20	47	76	114	116	129	148
Superannuation	8	9	9	9	11	11	12
Subscriptions	8	8	8	8	13	13	13
Accountancy	2	6	6	6	5	6	7
Bank charges	—	—	13	3	3	3	1
Overdraft interest	72	104	156	195	250	250	250
Secretary/receptionist	20	20	44	70	62	69	99
House expenses	—	—	26	52	48	75	75
Locum fees	—	—	150	120	156	164	160
Depreciation on car	—	—	—	—	—	—	19
Legal expenses	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total expenses	390	542	869	1,061	1,175	1,378	1,442
Gross income	721	1,266	1,970	2,876	3,010	3,493	3,992
Net profit	331	724	1,101	1,815	1,835	2,115	2,550

The new surgery.

was about £2,500. The colour scheme is bright—mainly pink and green. The linoleum is black with contemporary bright coloured lines. Each surgery contains a waiting-room and toilet and a consulting-room. Heating and lighting are by electricity.

Comment

This is a down-to-earth general practice on simple modern lines. Larkfield Hospital is about one mile distant. The ancillary services that are available include radiography, pathology, biochemistry, and bacteriology. Neither electrocardiography nor family doctor beds are yet available. As things are in the Health Service (February 1965) there would be little time for me to use the last two facilities.

The figures given here have been obtained from the clerk of the Renfrew County Executive Council. The income and expenditure figures have been compiled by a first-class firm of chartered accountants. The doctor-patient relationship in this practice is good. I have tried more to maintain order and quality of service than to aim at high numbers. Seldom are

there more than two calls in a weekend or more than one in the half-day off.

My colleague in the neighbouring practice finds the same, and we now operate a successful emergency rota. The lack of locums for holidays and sickness is the most serious handicap. Patients are encouraged to use the surgery and its telephone, thus leaving the house in peace. This works well, but means maintaining a high standard of service at the surgery—every morning and three afternoons and evenings a week.

Some might look upon me as a prisoner. It is quite pleasant to be imprisoned at the seaside in a practice where patients have selected their doctor and brought their friends with them as the years passed.

Summary

A Scottish family doctor describes the setting-up of a new National Health Service practice, and the provision of new temporary and permanent consulting premises.

The rate of growth of the practice to 2,400 patients, its net income to £2,550, and expenses to £1,442 are detailed yearly over seven years.

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