THE DEVELOPMENT OF POST-GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

BY

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The announcement recently made in the *British Medical Journal* that the Government intends to proceed with the project for establishing a post-graduate medical school in London will give pleasure to all who have followed this proposition with hopeful expectation. The possibility that London, with its unrivalled clinical facilities, may soon possess an adequately financed and well-equipped post-graduate school is indeed a fascinating one, though much will necessarily depend on the methods which are employed in its organization and the degree of support which it receives from the profession. It must be admitted that, in spite of the incessant and devoted efforts which have been made in various quarters—notably those connected with the West London and Prince of Wales's Hospitals, and with the Fellowship of Medicine—but little has yet been done in London to study the needs of the graduate as an individual and separate factor in medical education, and the result has been that present facilities for this important branch of training lag far behind those of many other cities, especially in America and on the Continent.

A somewhat extensive experience of post-graduate study in London and the Provinces, carried on during a series of furloughs from service abroad, and culminating in a whole year recently devoted to this pursuit, has given me certain very definite impressions, both of the defects in our present system, and of the requirements which are, in my opinion, essential to the success of the new project, and these I venture to submit for consideration and criticism.

DEFECTS IN OUR PRESENT SYSTEM

Lack of Study Directed to the Peculiar Needs of Graduate Students.—To my mind the outstanding defect of our present system lies in the fact that, with a few honourable exceptions, the graduate is usually treated far more as a rather embarrassing accretion to the problem of medical education than as a completely separate entity, demanding separate study and separate facilities. The post-graduate student arrives at a hospital in which a lecture or class has been advertised, and almost at once feels out of place. He is "neither fish, nor flesh, nor good red herring." He is obviously not a member of the staff, nor of the student body, if the hospital possesses one. He is not even a regular clinical assistant, and he looks round somewhat furtively for a room where he can sit whilst awaiting the class. Nor does his discomfort necessarily cease when the hour for the lecture arrives. I remember at least one occasion when more than twenty of us who were attending an advertised post-graduate course waited over half an hour for a lecturer who neither turned up nor telephoned to say that he could not do so. This is admittedly an exceptional case, but what was not exceptional was to listen to lectures bearing little or no trace of preparation for the type of audience to which they were addressed. There were some which were of immense value, and had obviously been specially prepared for men and women who had already had experience of medical practice, but far too many lectures were little more than a re-hash of addresses given to entirely different audiences, whilst many others were far better suited to undergraduate students. (I write from an experience of five years ago, and conditions may have greatly improved in this respect to-day.) The impression which was left upon the mind of most of us was that, in spite of the numerous classes advertised in London for the benefit of post-graduate students, there were but few lecturers who treated the class with sufficient seriousness to spend any considerable amount of time in studying their needs, and making adequate preparation for their instruction. And yet it must be self-evident that a post-graduate class, consisting as it does of physicians who, for the most part,

have already had considerable experience of professional work, demands an entirely different approach from the ordinary class of medical students, and will repay the most careful study and preparation.

Lack of Centralization.—Only those who have had actual experience of post-graduate study at a number of different London hospitals can form any conception of the aggravating amount of time and energy that is wasted every day in getting about from one lecture or class to another. There are admittedly certain valuable courses which are wholly conducted under one roof, but as a general rule the graduate will but rarely find his needs fully met in a single institution. Nor is this really to be wondered at. The larger and better-staffed medical centres in London are already so much occupied with the instruction demanded from them by their own undergraduate student body that they can hardly be expected to make large provision, in addition, for a class of men and women requiring a different method of instruction. The smaller hospitals, on the other hand, which welcome the post-graduate student, are, as a rule, too much crippled by lack of finance and by the demands of their clinical work to offer such wide facilities as will satisfy the post-graduate's varying needs. Thus it comes about that the unfortunate post-graduate student, in his endeavours to follow the most stimulating teachers and to attend what he considers the most valuable classes, finishes up by spending a large part of each day enjoying no other form of enlightenment than can be derived from the top of a London omnibus or from a study of the advertisements in the tube.

Paucity of Opportunity for Practical Work.—In dealing with the post-graduate problem it must never be forgotten that a large number of medical men and women who attend post-graduate classes are mainly concerned with the need for obtaining practical experience in those forms of medical and surgical investigation and treatment in which they feel themselves deficient. It is not so much lectures and demonstrations that they are seeking, as a chance of familiarizing themselves with certain methods of medical technique of which they are either ignorant or insufficiently experienced. Here a real difficulty is at once met, for but few of the existing hospitals are so organized as to supply this need, most of them naturally reserving such opportunities as they possess for their own student body, or for regularly appointed assistants. Some men of my acquaintance have endeavoured to solve this problem by going to the length of relinquishing for a time their own professional duties and taking modest posts as house-surgeons or clinical assistants. But such a solution can hardly be described as an ideal one, as it necessarily entails the expenditure of a large amount of time in ordinary routine duties which might far more profitably have been spent in other ways.

ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR POST-GRADUATE EDUCATION

It will thus be seen that, in spite of the increasing opportunities which are open to post-graduate students in a city such as London, the present system leaves much to be desired, and it is therefore worthy of the most serious consideration as to what are the requirements that ought, if possible, to be met in establishing an adequate and successful post-graduate centre.

1. The Centre Must be Primarily Educative

One of the greatest difficulties which face all medical educationists lies in the fact that the hospitals attached to our medical schools are almost bound to take precedence in public interest and support over the schools themselves, so that the educational features of the institution are apt to be subordinated to the practical and clinical side. When we think of the great medical schools in a city like London we inevitably regard them in terms of the hospital which has given them their name and prestige. It is not so much the illustrious teachers, *qua* teachers, whom we recall, as the renowned physicians and scientists, the skilled operators, and the men who have

advanced the cause of medicine by their researches and experiments. Many of these men have been notoriously poor teachers and their lectures a mere weariness to the flesh, but their value to the institution in which they play so striking a part cannot possibly be overestimated.

In the organization of a post-graduate centre, however, the emphasis needs to be shifted elsewhere. The post-graduate student will but rarely be attracted by the glamour of a brilliant and spectacular operator, the renown of a popular physician, or the intricate technique of a famous pathologist. What he is seeking, first and foremost, is a competent, lucid, and inspiring teacher, one who will take interest in and understand the conditions under which his medical work has hitherto been carried out, whether it be in a busy industrial area, a rural community, or in service over-seas, and who will open up to him new fields of understanding and extend his sphere of practical usefulness. Such a teacher must necessarily be *au courant* with the latest methods of investigation and treatment, but must be sufficiently young and detached to be able to devote considerable time and thought to the problems of the post-graduate student, in a way that the busy London physician and surgeon, occupied already with the claims of a large practice, and very probably the demands of other hospitals, can hardly hope to do.

If this assumption is correct it would follow that the staff of such an institution should be selected primarily by virtue of their proved capacity as teachers, and it is worthy of consideration whether they should not be, in the main, chosen from the younger members of the profession, and engaged on short-term appointments for a limited period of years. This would not hinder the reelection of a successful teacher, but it would prevent the loss of freshness and stimulus which invariably takes place when a teaching staff becomes so immersed in clinical duties as to cease to be inspiring educators.

2. The Centre must Provide for Very Diverse Needs

It is only necessary to visit such well-known post-graduate centres as Vienna and New York to gain an idea of the extraordinarily diverse character of the medical men and women who take advantage of such an opportunity of further training. And if a post-graduate centre is to be the success which all its supporters ardently desire, each of these separate types must be studied individually and be separately provided for. To name but a few of them:

First, there is the practitioner who is keen to keep abreast of the times, but is conscious of having become "rusty." Possibly he has been engaged in a large and somewhat remote practice, in which every ounce of energy has had to be expended on the routine demands of his numerous patients, leaving little or no time to do anything more than glance at a weekly medical journal. Or, again, he may be returning to this country after some years spent abroad, where he has been forced by circumstances to live to a large extent on his own medical capital. In either event, the practitioner is now ready and eager to devote several consecutive weeks, or even months, to the endeavour to brush himself up in every branch of the subject, particularly those in which his practice mainly lies, or in which he has specially realized his deficiencies. It is for such a man that "refresher courses" are so invaluable, particularly when conducted by a picked group of stimulating instructors who will give the student the opportunity of seeing and practising for himself the newest methods of investigation and treatment, with which he is unfamiliar.

Secondly, there is the practitioner who has the opportunity of a far more limited period of study—possibly only a single day a week, or a complete fortnight such as is now offered to panel doctors under the national insurance scheme—and is anxious to use it in intensive study along a single line in which he feels that he could extend his field of service. Perhaps he is running the *x*-ray plant of a local hospital, and wants to see something of the newer methods of electrotherapeutics, such as might with advantage be introduced there. Or it is some particular technique with which he wants to be more familiar

—for example, cystoscopy, spinal anaesthesia, blood grouping and blood transfusion, artificial pneumothorax, the injection of varicose veins and haemorrhoids, etc.—and he is anxious for an opportunity of carrying out such procedures himself under expert guidance and supervision. Or it may be that he has never felt at home in one or other of the special departments—dermatology, ophthalmology, ear, nose, and throat diseases, etc.—and he wants to seize the chance of some concentrated study in that particular line of work.

Thirdly, there are the foreign and colonial graduates, who, having completed their medical course in their own country, are anxious to widen their experience before starting upon their separate careers. They come from centres, it may be, where laboratory tradition is particularly strong, and are attracted to London by virtue of its reputation as a great centre of clinical teaching. What they are particularly seeking is the opportunity of attending out-patient clinics and ward rounds in the company of stimulating teachers, and of studying methods of diagnosis and treatment which differ in certain respects from those with which they are already familiar, and seeing types of disease not often met with in their own country.

Lastly, there is the young physician about to settle down in practice after holding various resident posts, and anxious to brush up in certain departments of medical work in which he has not had much opportunity of becoming experienced since his undergraduate days. He realizes that, as a student, with the overwhelming demands of his finals overshadowing everything else, he only devoted a minimum of time to certain types of disease commonly met with in general practice, and that it would be well worth while putting in a little intensive work along these lines before he makes his final plunge into practice or takes up a particular appointment in which special knowledge and experience will be expected from him.

If all these needs are to be met a large number of courses must necessarily be offered simultaneously all the year round, and a glance at such a syllabus as that which is published by the Post-Graduate School of New York will serve to show how numerous and varied these courses must be.

3. The Centre must Offer a Real Home to the Post-Graduate Student

A well-organized post-graduate centre must be far more than a mere place of call, providing specified courses at certain fixed hours. It should aim to be a real home of graduate medicine, offering facilities for the students' leisure hours as well as for the time he is under instruction. With this in view, comfortable common rooms and reading rooms, a well-stocked library, and a well-organized and self-explanatory museum should be regarded as essential parts of the scheme, in addition to well-equipped laboratories in which both research problems and the routine pathological work of the hospital are regularly carried out, and where there will always be a spare bench for any post-graduate student anxious to avail himself of the opportunity.

An inquiry office or bureau would also be of immense practical value, supplying students with information, not only on courses of instruction, scientific lectures, or surgical operations, but also on such practical matters as hotel and boarding-house accommodation, vacant medical appointments, practices offered for sale, and some of the many problems constantly met with by the practitioner. And perhaps it might not even be beneath the dignity of such a bureau to interest itself still further in the students' need of relaxation by supplying information on such topics as the nearest golf course and the best places of entertainment!

Given such a scheme, wisely planned and sympathetically carried out, the success of the post-graduate centre should be assured, and the encouraging results which have already followed the comparatively modest efforts recently attempted at various medical schools should justify the most optimistic forecasts as to the response which the scheme may hope to receive from members of the profession in all parts of the world.