On November 10th and 11th, 1965, the Association for the Study of Medical Education broke new ground by convening a conference to discuss the Postgraduate Medical Centre, which was attended by nearly 200 delegates: — clinical tutors appointed by the universities, surgical tutors appointed by the Royal College of Surgeons, and representatives of the Colleges, Regional Boards and Ministry of Health.

What probably came as the greatest surprise to everyone attending the conference was the discovery that the number of other people present was so large. Few may have realised how widespread the effort to improve the standards of postgraduate education in ‘non-teaching’ hospitals had become and how many consultants were not only deeply concerned about the training of their residents but were determined to take steps to improve it, even without any really substantial financial support from the Ministry of Health. Many of these consultants who had been fighting a more or less isolated battle in peripheral hospitals for many years to raise educational standards must have been surprised to find what good company they were in, and many who had felt frustrated by the constant shortage of money must have been heartened at hearing of other people’s difficulties and how they had been overcome. If the Conference achieved nothing else but make all who attended it aware of the fact that they were now taking part in a nation-wide movement to raise standards of education and training it must be considered to have been worthwhile. But in fact the numerous papers that were read, on the training of residents, the hospital library and museum, the further training of general practitioners and on interdepartmental teaching, and the discussion that followed each of them, were extremely helpful for everyone trying to make a contribution to this work.

There is no doubt that the development of postgraduate medical centres in regional hospitals and the appointment of tutors to stimulate their educational activities mark the beginning of an advance that must ultimately have a profound effect on the standard of medical care throughout the country. Now that they have received the official blessing of the Gillie Report, these centres can develop their activities to help general practitioners in a large number of different ways.

They will not only serve as meeting places for those working in all branches of the National Health Service, and so help to overcome the divisions which its creation did much to perpetuate and deepen. The informal nature of many of their activities will help to promote discussion and mutual understanding of problems other than clinical ones. It really does seem possible that a link can be forged between younger practitioners, newly arrived in areas where postgraduate centres are open, and the hospitals which will help to keep them in the main stream of current medical thinking and to maintain the concept of medicine that is now so widely accepted—of medicine as a life-long study. Many other activities of the centres can be envisaged—for instance, keeping married women in touch with current clinical thinking so that when the time comes for them to return to full-time or part-time work the transition can be made as effortless as possible, or linking up with the B.B.C. television programmes so as to enlarge their scope and provide something resembling a real University of the Air. These activities will need more time and more money but at least the Conference showed that the will to do more was there.

Editorial

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