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POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION IN DENMARK

ERIK TRIER, M.D.(Copenhagen)

POSTGRADUATE education has been discussed to a great extent among doctors, association committees, health authorities and among university teachers.

Owing to the relative shortage of teachers a co-ordination committee which has recently been appointed has just started work. The committee collects information about all postgraduate education planned or running for general practitioners and specialists. It is likely that this committee will fill a central role in the organization of postgraduate education in the near future.

General practitioners possess the confidence of the public in Denmark. However, the health authorities as well as the Medical Association know that many general practitioners never appear at postgraduate courses and doubt whether this gap is filled by home-study. This doubt lies behind the courses mentioned below, but so far the attendance does not come up to our expectations. Sooner or later the following conclusion will be openly admitted: a certain minority of general practitioners never appear voluntarily at postgraduate courses.

In consequence of this will the responsible authorities propose compulsory postgraduate courses?

The answers to a questionnaire concerning the postgraduate education of general practitioners in many European countries and the U.S.A. told us two years ago that in all the countries investigated postgraduate education is voluntary. But compulsory education exists in some 'Eastern' countries and in Yugoslavia as a condition for continuous authorization.

So far, this problem seems to be less important for specialists who attend meetings of the Scientific Medical Societies fairly regularly.

The following is a summary of the present arrangements:

Postgraduate Medical Education for General Practitioners

In 1914 the Danish Medical Association elected a Standing Committee for Postgraduate Education for General Practitioners, but owing to the First World War courses were first arranged in 1918.

Since then the committee has arranged a so-called 'Centralized postgraduate course' yearly. A course lasts a week, from Monday morning to Saturday noon with five to six hours' teaching daily. The teaching comprises lectures lasting three-quarters of an hour, clinical demonstrations, and in recent years clinical conferences too.

Until 1946 the courses were held in Copenhagen hospitals alone (the university teaching hospital, Rigshospitalet, and municipal hospitals) but since then courses have also been held in Aarhus every fourth year in collaboration with the new Aarhus university, and in 1961 a course was run in Odense for the first time in the County and City hospital, which is expected to be the nucleus of a medical faculty in a new third Danish university a few years ahead. Last year two centralized courses were run for the first time. As the number of participants in the centralized courses got too large, 100 has now been fixed as the maximum.

All expenses are met by the association. The budget is about 90,000 d.kr. (£4,500) yearly.

In order to increase the postgraduate education of general practitioners courses lasting a week have been arranged in several county hospitals on similar lines, but with 20 participants only lodged in the hospitals.

A 300 d.kr. fee is to be collected this year; it covers about half of the expenses, and the rest is met by a special grant.

During the last 20 years the committee has also run so-called 'De-centralized' courses. Teachers and items are yearly put on a list and forwarded to the local branches of the Danish Medical Association. As a rule the list comprises 15 to 18 items with several teachers covering each item. The committee pays for 12 lectures yearly in each local (county) branch, and in most places this number of lectures is given.

In many places these lectures are given in local hospitals, and often clinical demonstrations are given by the local hospital doctors in connection with the lectures given by travelling teachers.

The local Copenhagen Medical Association (covering about 325 general practitioners) arranges eight courses half-yearly with six to eight hours for each course. The lectures are given late in the afternoon for two hours a week. Also for these courses a token fee is collected.

Postgraduate Education during Specialist Study

The conditions for recognition as a specialist in

Denmark are at least six years' service in hospitals after authorization to practise. This authorization is obtained one year after the final examination at a university and after one year's service in a hospital, the so-called 'turnus', as a sort of house officer.

The six years' service includes primary training in the specialty, secondary training and supplementary training. The primary training lasts at least three years, and in most specialties is in a registrar appointment in more than one department.

Generally, a course and an examination is not a condition for obtaining a specialist certificate in this country, but in some specialties a bottle-neck owing to shortage of hospital house-officer or registrar posts has been met by courses.

This is the case for doctors, among others, studying to be psychiatrists, for whom one year's appointment in a neurological department is necessary. For some years concentrated courses in neurology lasting a fortnight have made up for a six-months' appointment in a neurological department.

In different specialties, i.e. surgery, anaesthesiology, pediatrics, psychiatry, radiology, audiology, more or less technical postgraduate courses can be open to younger doctors, together with specialists in the given specialty.

Fees are paid for these, and the Medical Association as a rule contributes with a grant to each course.