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INTRODUCTION

A POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL INSTITUTE AT EXETER

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THERE has been a long tradition of medical teaching at Exeter and up to 1858 there was a medical school. Since then postgraduate teaching has continued in various ways, perhaps the most important being through the Medico-Chirurgical Society, founded c. 1780 and still extremely active.

Both before and after the Second World War ward rounds attended by general practitioners and others have been carried on with varying success. During the past 15 years courses of weekly lectures and demonstrations in the autumn have proved most successful, an average of 60 doctors attending and paying a small fee for expenses. Monthly C.P.C.'s take place throughout the year, attended by the hospital medical staffs of all grades; a Child Health Group holds regular meetings and, under the ægis of the Postgraduate Federation of Bristol University, courses in obstetrics, medicine and other subjects, lasting up to a week, have been successfully organized.

The Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital is unusual in possessing a medical library in which is housed, jointly with the Cathedral Library, a collection of 17th- and 18th-century literature which is regarded by experts as among the four or five most important in the country. Apart from the historic interest of this collection, it has been the policy

of the library committee to keep a selection of current textbooks and to subscribe to the more widely read of the journals published in this country, financed by the Medico-Chirurgical Society, the consultant staffs and the H.M.C.

Two-and-a-half years ago a group of consultants, after several meetings, drew up a memorandum embodying their aspirations to form a Postgraduate Medical Institute in Exeter. The reasons for embarking on this scheme were several. Firstly it was felt that the staffs of undergraduate schools were finding it increasingly difficult to devote sufficient time to teaching both undergraduates and postgraduates, and consequently the major provincial centres and particularly those associated with a university should be able to fill this gap and provide the academic atmosphere which was regarded as essential for the success of such a scheme. There was no doubt that the clinical material available in Exeter was second to none. Secondly we were informed on many sides of the lack of postgraduate facilities both for refresher courses for general practitioners and also for overseas students, many of whom were unable to obtain postgraduate teaching in this country and as a result were compelled to go to other countries where language difficulties presented an added burden.

It was realized from the outset that, despite the absence of departments of physiology, human anatomy and pharmacology, the University of Exeter had much to offer. For not only had it active departments of zoology, botany, psychology and sociology, but a new department of biochemistry was in the course of construction and, more important still, it was felt that the university discipline and the contacts with other university activities would be of enormous importance to these students from overseas. Bristol University was approached with a view to supplementing any lack in the basic medical sciences and was most generous in its offers of help when needed.

It was thought that the Institute should have three main purposes:

1. To organize continued training of the junior hospital medical staff not only in medicine, surgery and other branches, but to prepare some for higher qualifications.

2. To provide courses for postgraduates, both from this country and overseas, in the broad principles of medicine as practised in this country running synchronously with the university terms. It is intended that students should receive teaching in the methods of hospital practice, public health, general practice, sociology, epidemiology and so on. Furthermore, it was hoped that they would have the opportunity to study patients in hospital by secondment to consultants working in the Exeter hospitals and other major centres in the South-West and also by some scheme of assistantship to general practitioners.

3. To provide refresher courses for general practitioners, which would have to take place during the university vacations.

The integration of this Institute with the University of Exeter was from the first regarded as a fundamental principle and one of the most important steps in its development was the acceptance of this by the Vice-Chancellor and Senate.

The next difficulty to be faced was that of finance. It seemed unlikely that much help could be forthcoming from the University Grants Committee in the 1962-67 quinquennium, although accommodation for the Institute presented no insuperable difficulty. An approach

was therefore made to the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. This organization displayed considerable interest in the project and asked various interested authorities to meet at Oxford under the chairmanship of Sir George Pickering in December 1961. The following May we were delighted to hear that the trustees had made a grant of £30,000 to Exeter for a trial period of five years. Further funds were, however, needed and the South-Western Regional Board very generously agreed to pay the salary of that part of a director's time spent on clinical work, together with the salary of a registrar and junior house officer to work on the unit. The board also agreed to provide accommodation for teaching at the main general hospital and to give the director time and opportunities to visit peripheral hospitals where he would meet the local general practitioners.

The consulting medical staffs of Plymouth, Torquay and Barnstaple were approached to discover whether they would be interested in the scheme and without exception they replied offering their help and co-operation. It should be possible for students to be given appointments in these hospitals during vacation and for the consultant staffs to give lectures and demonstrations.

Exeter has been doubly fortunate, for not only have funds been provided for the Postgraduate Medical Institute, but Mr. G. V. Northcott has generously given £100,000 to provide a centre where the medical profession of Devonshire may meet, and to finance research. It is hoped to provide a building, in conjunction with the South-Western Regional Hospital Board, containing a library, lecture-room, common-room, demonstration-room and space for research close to a new 800-bedded hospital, to be built on land in the city already owned by the Ministry of Health. The first stage of this hospital, a combined department of pathology and bacteriology, is due to start before the end of 1963. Although the Northcott Centre is essentially a separate plan both it and the Postgraduate Medical Institute are working for the improvement of medical standards and they should be able to work together towards this common goal in this ancient cathedral city.