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FURTHER EXPERIENCE OF COMMONWEALTH SCHOOLS

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THE DESIRABILITY of some form of orientation course or probationary period for overseas graduates seeking junior hospital appointments in the National Health Service is widely recognised, and was stressed by Dr. P. W. Hutton in an appendix to the 1962 Porritt Report on "Medical Aid to the Developing Countries". In an attempt to meet this need the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board, with the generous financial support of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust, have held three Commonwealth Schools at Stoke-on-Trent.

The Pilot School

Experiences of the pilot school in 1963 were reported elsewhere (Whitfield and McCall, 1963). Though no charge was made for meals, accommodation or tuition it was only possible to fill seven of the eight places available and at the conclusion of the school considerable difficulty was experienced in placing the seven who attended in suitable posts. Moreover it was apparent that most applicants were intent on using the school to help them to prepare for higher examinations rather than to fit them to work in British hospitals.

Since 1963 two further Commonwealth

Schools have been held at Stoke-on-Trent and as it is known that other regions are anxious to inaugurate similar projects a brief report of the additional problems and difficulties that have been encountered may be of value.

The Second School

The second school of eight weeks duration was held during November and December, 1963. These dates were chosen because house officer appointments in Birmingham Regional hospitals fall vacant early in January.

The school was advertised in the *Lancet* and *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, and the British Postgraduate Medical Federation, the Department of Technical Co-operation, the Commonwealth Medical Advisory Bureau of the British Medical Association and the Postgraduate Deans of Edinburgh and Glasgow were invited to nominate suitable applicants. In addition the school was brought to the attention of all overseas graduates applying directly to the University of Birmingham for postgraduate facilities.

In all, twenty-one applications were received for the seven places offered. Thirteen of the twenty-one had graduated in India, two in Pakistan, two in Ceylon, two in the United

Arab Republic, one in Iran and one in China. Testimonials from the Dean of the Medical School concerned and from those with whom the applicant had recently been working were obtained and also a full curriculum vitae, including details of prizes and distinctions awarded and marks and place in the final qualifying examination; seven were selected on the basis of this information without interview. Four were men and three were women. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty-four and they had graduated three to ten years previously. Five were Indian graduates, one (a U.A.R. graduate) was a Sudanese, and one came from Ceylon. All seven stated openly that they were aspiring to higher qualifications. Two already in possession of the D.G.O. of Calcutta wished to get the M.R.C.O.G., two were anxious to take the D.C.H., two the M.R.C.P. and one who had passed the M.S. of his university was aspiring to the F.R.C.S.

The arrangements for the school were that meals, accommodation and tuition would be supplied without charge, that no salary would be paid and that at the conclusion of the school those attending would be under obligation to apply for and if successful accept a house officer appointment in a hospital administered by the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board.

Immediately the school opened unforeseen difficulties arose. Four of the seven were in India when they applied to attend and they arrived at Stoke-on-Trent with the remains of £3 which was all that the exit and currency regulations of India allowed them to bring out of their country. It was therefore essential for them to obtain paid employment as soon as the school terminated. The result was that much of their eight weeks course was occupied in attending selection committees. Although in many cases short of applicants, hospital management committees in the Birmingham Region were not unnaturally reluctant to give their applications any special priority. Eventually all the seven obtained appointments but only one in the Birmingham Region.

The English of two was very poor and though they were given intensive tuition this was clearly one of the difficulties in getting them a job.

Though the consultant staff at Stoke-on-Trent were most interested in the project and most generous in their efforts to make it a success this second school provided little encouragement and it was with some reluctance that a third school was planned to prepare

candidates for house officer appointments falling vacant in January, 1965.

The Third School

In order to overcome the financial difficulties experienced in the second school those attending the third school were paid a house officer's salary by the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board during the period of this course and from this the cost of meals and accommodation was deducted at N.H.S. rates. Again no charge was made for tuition and those attending were under obligation to apply for and if successful accept house officer appointments in the Birmingham Region at the end of the School. In addition in order to permit them to do active clinical work rather than be mere observers they were required to be temporarily or fully registered by the General Medical Council and to be members of a medical defence union, and it was made clear to them that the school was intended to prepare them to hold a house officer appointment in a British hospital and not to help them to get a higher qualification.

The same avenues of advertisement and methods of selection as were used for the second school were employed and twenty-two applications were received for six places offered. The six chosen comprised four men and two women. Four were Indian graduates, one a graduate of Pakistan and the sixth, a Malay, had graduated from Tokyo.

This third school ran more smoothly than its predecessors but once again it proved difficult at the conclusion of the school to place those attending in suitable appointments. Despite the fact that two of the Area Directors of Postgraduate Medical Education responsible for other large groups of hospitals administered by the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board participated in the selection of applicants for the school, only three obtained appointments in Birmingham Regional Hospitals and these were all in the Stoke-on-Trent group. Of the remaining three, two obtained appointments elsewhere in Great Britain and the Tokyo graduate was permitted to go to Dublin to take the L.A.H.

Conclusions

Though the need for an orientation course or probationary period for overseas graduates wishing to work in British hospitals is widely acknowledged, experience of these three Commonwealth Schools suggests that such projects do not appeal very strongly to overseas

graduates, however generous the terms and conditions may be. Neither do hospital management committees unconnected with the school regard them as a satisfactory way of filling their house officer appointments. They certainly involve much effort on the part of those responsible for their administration and execution and their cost is not inconsiderable. The three schools that have so far been held have undoubtedly made a contribution both to the efficiency of the National Health Service and to "Medical Aid to Developing Countries" but while overseas graduates can obtain house officer appointments without preliminary training in this country and while the present system of appointment of house officers prevails it seems dubious whether such activities are sufficiently valuable to the region and the university concerned to justify the effort and money involved. Our experience suggests that in most instances overseas graduates come to England to get higher qualifications and that those of them who desire to have clinical experience in this country or whose financial position necessitates a paid appointment have little difficulty in obtaining a post without a period of preliminary assessment or orientation, and the undoubted benefits of such training and evaluation make but little impact on those responsible for filling house officer vacancies. Furthermore there appeared little doubt that the larger number of applicants for the second and third schools resulted chiefly from the new regulations regarding exit from India and entry into the United Kingdom which were imposed by the Indian and British governments shortly after the first school. It was apparent from many of the applications

that the Commonwealth Schools were regarded as a convenient means of complying with these regulations and at the same time achieving the objective of coming to England to sit higher examinations.

Future Plans

An alternative plan is being formulated by the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board under which overseas graduates desiring to hold a house officer appointment in a British hospital are given a residential attachment to a hospital or hospital group within the Region for a period of about six weeks. Such attachments will be under the supervision of the Clinical Tutor or Area Director of Postgraduate Medical Education of the hospital or group and not more than one or two overseas graduates will be allocated to any hospital or group at a time. They will be required to be temporarily or fully registered by the General Medical Council and to be members of the Medical Defence Union; they will be paid a house officer's salary and they will have the full benefit of all the clinical and educational facilities which the hospital or group offers. At the end of their period of attachment the impression they have made on the local staff will decide firstly whether they can be given a house officer appointment within the hospital or group concerned and secondly, if no vacancy is locally available, the extent to which their candidature for appointment elsewhere can be supported.

REFERENCE

WHITFIELD, A. G. W., and McCALL, A. J. (1963): Commonwealth Schools, *Lancet*, i, 1318.