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RESEARCH PROJECT IN COMMUNITY MEDICINE POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

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THE POSTGRADUATE Medical Institute of the University of Exeter was established two years ago and a progress report on its activities was published recently in the *Postgraduate Medical Journal* (Brimblecombe, 1965). From the beginning it was intended that the Institute should encourage medical research in general practice in addition to more formal postgraduate education, and eighteen months ago a small group of general practitioners and hospital consultants was set up to discuss plans for a joint research project in community medicine. This project has now received generous financial backing from the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. The group were impressed by the urgent need to investigate new methods for postgraduate medical education and to examine the structure and organisation of general practice in different areas, in particular the working of the National Health Service in the Exeter area.

About 80,000 people live in the City of Exeter and the main purpose of this research project is to carry out a detailed morbidity survey of this population over a twelve-month period. The great majority of the general practitioners in Exeter have already expressed their wish to take part in this survey and it is hoped that it will include between 50,000 and 60,000 of the total population. This will provide a reference population as a basis for later intensive studies of particular diseases or of

various aspects of general practice. In addition, the findings will be analysed so as to furnish for collaborating practitioners not only morbidity statistics but also relevant details of practice structure.

Dr. J. R. Ashford, Senior Lecturer in Mathematical Statistics at the University of Exeter has had considerable experience of the organisation of large scale epidemiological surveys and will be responsible for processing all the survey data. Extensive use will be made of electronic computers. A number of special surveys will be going on at the same time as the main survey which is expected to take three years to complete. These special surveys will include an investigation of the incidence of arthritis and rheumatism in Exeter, and a comparative study of postal and other survey methods of investigating illness in the community. The success of this research programme will depend on strong central direction by a doctor with previous experience of epidemiology or socio-medical research. The University are hoping to appoint a clinical epidemiologist in the near future to direct this research programme and it is anticipated that a start will be made on the main survey in the Spring of next year.

REFERENCE

BRIMBLECOMBE, F. S. W. (1965): A Progress Report on the Postgraduate Medical Institute of the University of Exeter, *Postgrad. med. J.*, **41**, 169.