History

History of the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine

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The Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine came into existence in 1918. Highlights of its history and the lives of many of the people who have moulded its past are detailed in a recently published book.

The first issue of the *Postgraduate Medical Journal (PMJ)* was published in October 1925; this has evolved from a slender document of local interest to a major international journal concentrating on all aspects of postgraduate and continuing medical education. The *PMJ* however had a forerunner (from April 1919), which was entitled the *Emergency Post-graduate scheme: weekly programme*; this publication concentrated on provision of dates and venues of postgraduate medical courses and lectures that were then available in London. This publication gave way to the *Bulletin of the Fellowship of Medicine*, which was the *PMJ*'s immediate predecessor; later attempts were made to extend coverage to the provinces in addition to London.

Thus various publications have always occupied a prominent position in the affairs of the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine (FPM). But what precisely is the function of this organisation, and what is its history? Until now, no detailed account of the formation and role of the FPM has been available. Recently, by careful perusal of the Fellowship's archives, including the minute books dating from 1918, the history of this important, pioneering organisation has at last been written.¹

When Sir William Osler Bt FRS (1849–1919) came to England from Baltimore in 1905, to take up the Regius Chair of Medicine at Oxford, he was less than impressed with the state of postgraduate medical education in Britain. Several European cities, most notably Vienna, had already instituted courses to provide continuing medical training.

The FPM (as it is now titled) came into existence in late 1918. Numerous medical graduates who had served in the first world war (1914–18) flocked to London in search of postgraduate training. The situation then was regrettably disappointing. Existing facilities were rudimentary; C R B Keetley (1848–1909) and L A Bidwell (1865–1912) at the West London Hospital, Jonathan Hutchinson (1828–1913) at the Medical Graduates' College and Polyclinic, and R H P Crawford (1865–1938) at the London Post-graduate Association had pioneered the subject, up to a point, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The London School of Clinical Medicine (which was never a great success) had been set up in 1906 at the Dreadnought Hospital, Greenwich.

The scene was therefore set for a major thrust in London in the realm of postgraduate medical education. John MacAlister (1856–1925)—who had already been largely responsible for the foundation of the Royal Society of Medicine (RSM)—transpired to be the linchpin. It was he who served as the first (joint) Secretary of an emergency scheme (which gave rise to the Fellowship of Medicine (FM)) to provide postgraduate education for those graduates who emanated from North America and the British Dominions and who had served in the war. Furthermore, he was instrumental in providing administrative accommodation at the RSM.

In the autumn of 1919, the FM fused with the Postgraduate Medical Association (PMA), which had recently been formed by Osler, and it was he who became the first President of this

amalgamated organisation—the “FM & PMA”. Sadly, Osler died in late 1919, but not before the combined society was in “full swing”. Many of the most distinguished physicians and surgeons in England served on its committees, and it was very largely responsible for two government reports on postgraduate training: the *Athlone Report* (1921)² and the *Report of the [Government's] Postgraduate Medical Education Committee* (1930).³

Although the FM was not officially acknowledged, many of its ideas were encompassed within these reports, and it was as a result of the second of these that the (Royal) Postgraduate Medical School (RPMS) at Hammersmith was established, in 1935.

During the second world war (1939–45), the title of this organisation was changed, in 1944, to the more accurate one—the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine. After this war, postgraduate medical education in Britain really “took off”. The Postgraduate Medical Federation was launched in 1945, with Sir Francis Fraser (1885–1964), who had then moved from the RPMS, as its first Director. Also at this time, the Royal Colleges became far more interested in postgraduate education, and most hospitals in Britain established Postgraduate Centres. In 1962, the FPM became *incorporated*, with Maurice Davidson (1883–1967) as its first President.

This new book¹ highlights the major events in the history of this pioneering institution, and brings to life many of the eminent physicians and surgeons who have moulded its fascinating past, over the best part of a century.

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Details of the book *John MacAlister's other vision: a history of the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine* are available on the facing page of this issue of the journal.

REFERENCES

- 1 Cook GC. *John MacAlister's other vision: a history of the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine*. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing, 2005.
- 2 Anonymous. *Report of the Post-graduate Medical Committee*. May 1921. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1921:29.
- 3 Ministry of Health. *Report of the Postgraduate Medical Education Committee*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930:37.