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POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION IN FRANCE

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It is very difficult to present a picture of postgraduate medical education in France, since this is the result of activities in so many hospital and university centres, varying moreover from place to place. That in Paris is the most ambitious and will be described here. One other preliminary observation must be made: neither town nor country practitioners have much time to give to postgraduate courses, whether lectures or conferences, since they are often overworked already.

The Teachers

These are members of hospital or university staffs, recruited by examinations. In France there is a university as well as a hospital career. Hospital examinations confer the successive titles of *externe*, *interne*, assistant and hospital physician, surgeon or specialist, of whom all except the first take part in postgraduate education. The university career, in the clinical sciences, proceeds by the *chef de clinique* examinations which are held between internship or assistantship and admission to the teaching staff (*agrégation*). This university stage usually follows the hospital stage in a doctors' training. But many hospital doctors content themselves with their hospital careers and do not go on to *agrégation*. After the examination for the latter, the highest position, Faculty Professor, is filled by election.

In the basic sciences there has only been, until now, a university career with the position of *professeur agrégé* filled by examination and that of professor by election. But a reform actually going through, intended to improve medical education, will tend to combine hospital and university careers. The *médecin des hôpitaux* examination will confer the title of *professeur agrégé* in clinical science and this recognition of the basic sciences will permit a pathologist, physiologist or biochemist to become the director of a hospital laboratory.

Actually, most postgraduate educational activities are organized by the heads of hospital services who are *médecins des hôpitaux* and who may or may not be *agrégés* or professors of clinical sciences at the same time, while those holding similar positions in the basic sciences also make their contribution to postgraduate teaching in the hospitals.

The role of the *Collège de Médecine des Hôpitaux de Paris* must also be emphasized. Eighty per cent. of specialists in Paris hospitals belong to it, whether or not they hold a university position. One of its principal aims is to foster medical education at every level, and especially postgraduate education, by arranging conferences in every specialty.

The Means of Postgraduate Education

These are numerous. There are many journals, two of which are particularly important to the postgraduate, namely *La Revue de Praticien* and *La Semaine des Hôpitaux*. The latter is the organ of the College of Medicine, which also publishes a journal, founded more recently, of more theoretical interest: *Les Cahiers du Collège de Médecine*. The College also publishes, as a monthly supplement to *La Semaine des Hôpitaux*, a daily programme of educational activities in the different hospital services, including postgraduate lectures.

We need hardly mention that entry to these Faculty courses for students is free and that any doctor wishing to hear a professor or *agrégé* dealing with a particular subject can always do so.

There are many learned societies, specialized and otherwise, with weekly or monthly meetings which are equally open. Some of the national societies hold their meetings in Paris on a Sunday for the convenience of provincial members.

Lectures, however, form the basis of postgraduate education. Some are held at the Faculty of Medicine, so that there is, in Paris, an annual programme of lectures on practical problems, held in the evenings: the lecturers are university teachers who nearly always hold a hospital post as well. Scientific films are also shown.

The great majority of lectures are held in hospitals. Every year, in October, the *Entretiens de Bichat* are held in Paris, coinciding with the Motor Show: a large number of practitioners in Paris and the provinces attend, and the lecturers are members of the staffs of provincial as well as Paris hospitals. The subjects, which must be practical and include recent advances, are covered in 10 to 20 minutes and are dealt with once or twice during the week in different specialized sections. Each lecture is followed by a brief discussion. Some sessions are devoted to therapeutics, discussions, films and television.

Apart from these, countless lectures are given during the year in most hospital departments. In some, one hour of the morning is reserved weekly, fortnightly or monthly for higher medical education or for a C.P.C., according to a programme drawn up for the whole year. These conferences and lectures are arranged by the staffs of the services and are attended by students, externes, internes and practitioners.

Other services may organize, once a year, refresher days, including a series of these lasting two or three days, morning and afternoon; the specialized medical services such as cardiology or nephrology are the ones most often concerned. Admission to these conferences is usually free for the internes but a contribution is customary for others attending.

The audience is made up of specialists and members of the service and often of other hospital services as well. Several chiefs of services in the same specialty may organize a joint refresher course, even collaborating in different hospitals. As well as theoretical sessions some may be devoted to practical techniques such as endoscopy or respiratory function tests.

Nearly all the specialized services, of which the chiefs are *médecins des hôpitaux* as well as Faculty professors, organize such refresher courses, to which those studying for the specialist diploma come as well as others. As an example, the pulmonary tuberculosis clinic may be mentioned. Each year, in the autumn, a refresher course is arranged, to last nearly two months, which is attended by candidates for the specialist diploma and for the examination for sanatorium physicians as well as by doctors from French-speaking Africa. The programme covers the problems of pulmonary and extra-pulmonary tuberculosis from the standpoint of anatomy, bacteriology and therapeutics, as well as the clinical, social and public-health aspects, and includes other respiratory diseases as well. In the spring, this clinic organizes two medico-surgical days devoted to pulmonary tuberculosis, with two three-hour sessions each day, each comprising a seminar devoted to two practical problems, in which French or foreign specialists may take part, each dealing with one aspect of the problem for a few minutes. The audience, which is made up of both Paris and provincial specialists in private or sanatorium practice, may take part in the discussion.

Some lectures are held in the evening. Some are open to all, such as the therapeutic conferences at the Necker Hospital, where each month, a theme is discussed by a group of specialists after an introductory talk by one of them, in front of an audience mainly of general practitioners.

On other services, at weekly, fortnightly or monthly intervals, sessions are held which draw together the older internes anxious to keep in touch with a specialty, sometimes with candidates for the specialist diploma. Programmes vary from one service to another; they often begin by reviewing the work of the service and then go on to present case reports with X-rays, ECGs, etc.

The Postgraduates

Reference has already been made to the three groups of postgraduate students, practitioners who may or may not be specialists, candidates for the hospital internship examination and those working for specialist diplomas.

Practitioners, if their spare time permits, attend some of the activities outlined above. Some are

specially arranged for them, such as the *Entretiens de Bichat*, and they form the bulk of the audience; they can, in a few days each year, make themselves acquainted with the main topical medical problems without attending every discussion, since the proceedings are published each year.

The candidates for the internship examination are externes, themselves selected by examination from the medical students. Usually this goal is only achieved after roughly six years of university studies. Thus these candidates are broadly distinguished by several years of daily practical hospital work as externes from those students who have not wanted or been able to pass the first stage of the hospital examinations, that for externship. The externes benefit from the daily teaching of the chiefs in the course of presenting their cases. Moreover the *Collège de Médecine des Hôpitaux* has organized for them, on one evening each week, a course of lectures in which the subjects of their examination are dealt with by members of the College. These lectures, announced in advance by notices and in medical journals, are designed for these candidates, but may be attended by practitioners who want to do so and thus provide them with a series of reviews by the most prominent specialists in each subject.

The diplomas for special studies, created in the last decade, are designed, as the name suggests, as qualifications for specialists. There are diplomas in many of the clinical and basic sciences, for instance, pædiatrics, cardiology, pulmonary tuberculosis, rheumatology, neuro-psychiatry, gastro-enterology, obstetrics and gynaecology, E.N.T. ophthalmology, pathology and bacteriology. For the last two, instruction is given at the Faculty of Medicine under the direction of the professors of the basic sciences and their *agrégés*. For the other diplomas, education is provided at a hospital; in the specialist services, it is organized by the chief of the service who holds the corresponding clinical chair, but the candidates are divided among all the services of this specialty regardless of whether the chief holds a university appointment or not. These specialist studies usually last three years. The candidates are students who have completed the six years of study at the Faculty, externes who do not wish to work for the internship examination or practitioners who are doctors of medicine and wish to take up a specialty. The latter is of practical importance, for specialization allows them to charge twice the ordinary fees, which is then repaid to the patients by the social security service. These special studies are re-

cognized by annual examinations and by a final, national one. Internes of hospitals in towns with Faculties of Medicine are exempt from the examination provided they passed, as internes, a sufficient period in the hospital service of a particular specialty. Besides attending hospital courses the candidates for these diplomas have to follow a theoretical course drawn up by the hospitals; this programme covers the basic physiological, technical and clinical aspects of each specialty, as well as the fundamentals of internal medicine. The number of candidates for each diploma is a few dozen each year. Some externes therefore prefer to turn towards the acquisition of a specialized diploma rather than to submit themselves to the hazards and the long, hard preparation of the internship examination. This is evident if one considers the fall in the number of internes working in medicine in recent years, while the number in surgery has stayed the same: this amounts to saying that internship is in practice the only way to get a surgical training. This dissatisfaction of the externes with the internship in medicine seems serious if one considers that internship remains, in France, by far the best higher school of medicine.

Conclusions

Attention is drawn to the complexity of postgraduate medical education in France. Hospital staffs have always been charged with this responsibility, and a constant effort on their part is needed for the continuous renewal of both the technical and the scientific bases of medicine. The increase in the number of lectures and conferences is probably due partly to the ever-increasing tendency to specialisation in hospital medicine and partly to the spirit of enquiry amongst doctors themselves.

The present trend in hospital medicine towards full-time work will undoubtedly increase the time devoted by the staffs to education at the postgraduate level. At the same time another revolution is occurring in general practice which is gradually losing its 'liberal' character.

It is not certain that this change will give practitioners some freedom to devote time to attending postgraduate courses. This would be particularly desirable, so that they could take advantage of it to keep themselves up-to-date in medical progress. Would it not now be possible, in the further development of general practice, to ensure for them periodic grants which would enable them to attend refresher courses without suffering too great a financial loss?