

Editorial

Postgraduate medical education and clinical tutors – the way forward

In 1989, the Secretary of State for Health, Mr Kenneth Clarke, asked the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Donald Acheson, to call together a small group of experts to advise on the future structure of postgraduate medical education. At the joint meeting on postgraduate medical education held in York on July 6 1990, the Secretary of State announced that he accepted fully the main recommendations of the CMO's Expert Advisory Group on how education should be funded and organized in the post-reform National Health Service.

The first of the ten principles formulated by the Group is the basic article of faith, that high standards of training and continuing medical education are 'fundamental to the provision of high quality patient care in the NHS'. Those junior hospital doctors who find the service load encroaching on time for education and who are openly discouraged from applying for their study leave entitlement will be gladdened to note that the very next principle is that 'there should be no disincentives to undertaking postgraduate and continuing medical education'. Whilst funding is mainly the responsibility of the NHS and will, we are told, be 'protected', it will be the amount available that will determine whether the District Managed Units and Trusts will be able to translate this and other principles into practice. It is to be hoped that in budgeting for education, the Secretary of State's request to Regions to identify what they are currently spending will be met by these figures plus estimates of what should additionally be being spent but is not.

Other principles enunciate the role of the Royal Colleges, the Joint Training Committees, the General Medical Council and the Universities in the setting of standards for comprehensive education programmes, devised for Regional Health Authorities by the Postgraduate Deans who are to become the budget holders. These programmes are to take account of the results of medical audit. The need for the monitoring of standards of postgraduate and continuing education is the penultimate of the ten principles of the CMO's Group.

The tenth principle recognizes the need to establish standards for the training of trainers. The university appointed clinical tutors play a pivotal role in promoting educational programmes and in the day to day running of the budget in the postgraduate centres of district hospitals. It is proposed that tutors will in future be based at Unit

level to become more sensitive to local needs and to help promote a proper balance between educational and service needs with managers with whom they will then share coterminous domains. In relation to the training of tutors, Kenneth Clarke referred to the launching, at the York meeting, of the National Association of Clinical Tutors training package.

For most of us who are or have been clinical tutors the usual three to five year stint has been a more or less prolonged learning curve with a large element of trial and error. To ensure that tutors obtain a more effective and progressive training, the National Association of Clinical Tutors (NACT) requested funding from the Department of Health to review the educational needs of clinical tutors and develop an open learning text to meet these needs. The training package is the outcome of collaboration between NACT, the Open University and the Joint Centre for Educational Research and Development with funding from the Department of Health.

The package currently consists of four modules; educational requirements and provision; funding and resource management; managing change; and postgraduate centre operation. The modular design enables learners to work at their own pace and a module at a time. In addition to the core modules, there are options to enable the tutor to see how basic principles relate to important practical aspects of the clinical tutors' daily responsibilities. These include training in general practice in Module 1, business planning in Module 2, change for careers and change for audit in Module 3 and the postgraduate centre administrator in Module 4. The package is designed to enhance the individual tutor's inherent skills and develop personal interests within a wide field in addition to teaching basic essentials. It is user friendly reflecting the professional educational expertise that has gone into its preparation. The package will certainly be of value, as NACT suggest, to centre administrators, college tutors and others involved in postgraduate training and continuing medical education.

The National Association of Clinical Tutors and all those involved in this enterprise are to be congratulated for their initiative and its outcome, the NACT training package. No clinical tutor and postgraduate centre should be without one. The package is a practical contribution to providing substance to the principles of the CMO's expert

advisory group for post-reform NHS postgraduate medical education.

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Note

The NACT Training Package costs £50 including postage and can be obtained from: NACT, 6 St Andrew's Place, London NW1 4LB.