Evolving General Practice

The University of Dundee and the Department of General Practice

The early years 1970-92

The University of Dundee began as a college of St. Andrews University and only became an independent institution as recently as 1967. The senior faculty of its medical school soon realised it needed a department of general practice. Thus on April 1 1970 Dr James Knox, a general practitioner, left his NHS group practice in Edinburgh to become the inaugural professor of General Practice.

Originally based at 166 Nethergate near the main university campus but remote from the medical school at Ninewells hospital, the department was without a clinical base initially but free to work out its strategy. Early priorities included:

- Identifying a cadre of general practitioner contributors to the undergraduate programme.
- Working on content, teaching and assessment methods in a programme of Problem Based Learning.
- For the Tutors, helping them acquire the necessary skills and preparing the practices for the tasks.

Contrary to expectations in some quarters, the department’s teaching was not ‘more of the same’, but was breaking new ground. Throughout the ensuing years, a feature of the Department’s activities was arranging frequent meetings with GPs in many different (usually informal) settings.

Research

Promoting academic general practice locally and throughout Scotland - The Scottish General practitioner Research Support Unit was a medium-term project to assist general practitioners to develop their own research ideas in their own practices. From 1970 to 1980, by which time all Scottish Medical Schools had their own Departments of General Practice, help was available from the Research Support Unit (RSU) based in the Dundee Department, a joint project involving:

- University of Dundee
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Scottish Home and Health Department

The RSU’s activities were supervised by a Board, chaired by the late Mr W Gregson CBE, Ferranti, Edinburgh, meeting two or three times a year. The Chief Scientist organisation eventually took over this role. The RSU closed in 1980 and during the decade of its existence it provided encouragement, advice and statistical help to numerous doctors throughout Scotland, assisting them in studies, some for higher degrees.

The Unit provided a base for a large study led by Dr Albert Jacob, a Dundee GP, on the effects of the new health centres on Dundee’s primary health care. It also ran an influenza monitoring service involving 50 Tayside GPs.

Teaching
It was seven years before the Medical School teaching practice was established with its own small list of 2000 patients and based in The Westgate Health Centre in the grounds of Ninewells Hospital – the first example of a General Practice teaching and research facility to be based in such close proximity to the traditional focus of medical teaching. The development owed much to Dr Campbell Murdoch (senior lecturer) and lecturers Dr Peter Campion and Dr Ron Neville. Eventually Professor Knox was able to join the practice as a principal.

The main aim of the department was to complement hospital based medical teaching by using the setting of general practice for student learning. Emphasis was put on problem solving. One particular role assumed by the department and shared with others (notably the behavioural scientists), was helping students to acquire and enhance their interviewing skills. This involved the use of real patients and actors and the use of video-feedback and was introduced to students in the pre-clinical phase. Another contribution was the development of problem based assessment using various methods including the modified essay question.

**Tayside Centre for General Practice (TCGP) 1992-**

In 1992 John Bain was appointed as Prof Knox’s successor. Like Prof. Knox, he had been a trainee in the Department of General Practice with Prof. Richard Scott in Edinburgh and had held the foundation chair of General Practice in Southampton before moving to Dundee. When he arrived discussions began with the postgraduate department led by Robin Scott which ultimately led to an integrated unit creating TCGP. This innovative development, the first in the UK, achieved many of its original aims:

- promoting primary care research;
- facilitating audit in the Tayside Audit Resource for Primary Care (TARPC) led by Arlene Napier;
- supporting practice development;
- developing undergraduate and postgraduate education in general practice and developing career opportunities for general practice researchers, teachers and trainers.

Once these major changes in learning and professional development were well established NHSTayside agreed to establish a chair of Research and Development in General Practice and Primary care. Frank Sullivan moved from the University of Glasgow to take up this post. As John Bain neared retirement in 2001 Dave Snadden the regional advisor became head of TCGP. Dave initiated the multi-institutional Scottish MSc in primary care which continues to provide masters training across a range of primary care disciplines in Scotland. When John did retire Tom Fahey joined us from Bristol for four years as professor of primary care medicine. When he moved to Dublin his place was taken by Bruce Guthrie returning to Scotland from a Harkness Fellowship in Stanford.

**Divisionalisation 2005-**

In recent years departments have become unfashionable management entities and the University of Dundee has not been immune to the trend. Academic general practice plays a major role in the new Division of Clinical and Population Sciences and
Education (CPSE) of the College of Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing as well as the East of Scotland Postgraduate deanery. Led by Dr. Jon Dowell (Reader) undergraduate education is integrated with communication skills, clinical skills, public health and behavioural science in the early years. In later years students are taught in practices all over Scotland and in the innovative Medicine in Malawi Project\textsuperscript{iii}. The Postgraduate Director for the East of Scotland Deanery is Dr. David Bruce and continuing professional development is being developed by Dr. Mairi Scott in the Professional Development Academy\textsuperscript{iv}. Within Dundee our research is increasingly focused on issues of Quality, Safety and Informatics with Bruce Guthrie leading the multidisciplinary group of that name in CPSE. Other research is coordinated by the Scottish School of Primary Care (SSPC) whose current director is Frank Sullivan\textsuperscript{v}.

Dundee's particular strength has been the people of Dundee and Tayside who have tolerated and now welcome Med Students from around the world. They are also enthusiastic partners helping us to address research questions. Building on the foundations of earlier years the Tayside Centre for General Practice continues to work across the full academic spectrum of academic \textsuperscript{vi}.

Professors James Knox and Frank Sullivan

\textsuperscript{ii} \url{http://www.sspc.ac.uk/mscprimarycare/} last accessed 12.10.09
\textsuperscript{iii} \url{http://www.dundee.ac.uk/pressreleases/2007/prsept07/malawimedicalstudents.html} last accessed 12.10.09
\textsuperscript{iv} \url{http://www.sspc.ac.uk/pda/} last accessed 12.10.09
\textsuperscript{v} \url{http://www.sspc.ac.uk/} last accessed 12.10.09
\textsuperscript{vi} \url{http://www.dundee.ac.uk/medschool/cacp/tcgp} last accessed 12.10.09