



acp News

NEWS-SHEET OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CLINICAL PATHOLOGISTS SPRING 2000

ISSN No. 0260-065X



Fulfilment in Retirement
Bioterrorism

Unity of Pathology
Medieval Governance

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'Dr Syntax entertained at college'. Drawn & etched by Rowlandson. Published June 1819, London. Editor's Collection.

Editorial

Carl Gray, Editor

Workforce Crisis

The hubbub has risen to uproar; the trickle of carping has become a mighty cataract of derision. There is a crisis in medical manpower in pathology departments and that's official. Colleagues attending Advisory Appointment Committees – after being properly trained in avoiding discriminatory selection practices – have noticed for some years that avoiding discrimination is easy. Because no-one applies at all.

The prospect of whole hospitals without pathologists looms and there is insufficient capacity anywhere to share out the residual workload. Patients will suffer as their diagnoses are delayed or denied. Pathologists everywhere are struggling to deliver workloads doubled in less than a decade with too few staff. It seems that there are only a fifth of the required number of trainees in the training system and the co-factors of early retirement and continuing demand expansion will leave about a quarter to a third of all Histopathology posts vacant within five years. Microbiology seems set to follow on a similar course.

The recent recalculations of manpower data are awesomely dire and something must be done. At last, there is a remedial process. This has been placed in the hands of an awesomely vigorous individual at the height of his powers. The process is called the Workforce Advisory Group and the individual is called Professor Philip Quirke. His task is to obtain new training posts (or numbers) and corresponding funding from the Government. These must then be filled with the best young people available and placed in suitable training departments. It seems that training capacity will not be the limiting factor. We wait five short years and then relax.

Ingenious short-term expedients will be explored fully, but we are doomed to too few histopathologists for the next few years. Despite some allies up top, the funding argument is by no means won. A hard battle is needed to extract the necessary funding against all the other demands of the NHS. Radiology colleagues are in a similar position and deserve no less support.

Should we rely on quiet, behind-the-scenes state craft – the softly, softly, 'look here old chap,' approach – or should there be a frankly political campaign with all-out, in-your-face media coverage? It's a slippery monkey that will have to be caught.

Individual pathologists can help in various ways and every individual contribution will count towards the war effort. Encourage young people into careers

in pathology, perhaps via student projects and intercalated BSc degrees in Pathology. Be especially nice and encouraging to young doctors in their interactions with 'The Path Lab.' Write at once to various authorities with evidence-based advice detailing the adverse effects on patients of the workforce shortfall. Suitable recipients might include the PRCP, the Chief Medical Officer, Prof Mike Richards who is the 'Cancer Tsar,' the Secretary of State, local MPs and your Regional Chief Executive, whoever that is.

No-one has ever got medical manpower planning right, owing to the opacity of crystal balls. (Try saying that after a beverage or two!) But Phil needs all the help he can get. Don't tell him to boil his head because we've done it already in Yorkshire and very nice it looks. Constructive ideas please to Phil Quirke at philq@pathology.leeds.ac.uk.

Nothing Doing?

One element of the recovery plan for the medical workforce borders on the surreal. A committee is being set up to identify things we can stop doing and thus save time for more necessary functions. This is clearly a 'Very Good Thing!'

But a 'Committee for Doing Nothing' could perhaps resemble the celebrated 'Society for Putting Things on Top of Other Things' portrayed by the much-loved Monty Python team. 'This year has been a good one for the Society...' intoned Eric Idle as the mock portentous Secretary of the Society.

Imagine a meeting of the new Committee. The Chairman – and I don't know who this is – would review the minutes of the previous meeting. 'The blank sheet being circulated now is the list of all the things we have not done since last time. On the back, also blank, are today's Agenda items. There aren't any.' Suggestions for further things not to do would be invited. And then the Committee would stand and, perhaps led by the Official Jester, sing its official song:

*'We're busy doing nothing,
Working the whole day through,
Trying to find lots of things not to do!'**

After a luncheon of complete nihilism, positivity would set in with tea. By the time for people's carriages and railway trains, a re-vitalised troop of action men and women would storm down the stairs, chanting their motto: *'De nihilo nihilum, in nihilum nil posse reverti!'***

So busy pathologists everywhere: do try to find something not to do and stop it at once. Don't do it



Dr Gray is a Consultant Histopathologist at Harrogate District Hospital, North Yorkshire

ever again; not ever; well, hardly ever.

Editorial Team

We are delighted to report that Council has appointed Mark Whittaker as *Trainees' Editor*. Dr Whittaker is a Specialist Registrar in Histopathology at Southampton General Hospital. He will be delighted to hear from trainees wishing to contribute material to *acp News*. We have a Trainees' Editor so that trainees can get stuff in! It's your journal so why not write in?

In a new and exciting development, we seek to enlarge further the editorial team at *acp News*. Experience of quarterly publication for one year suggests that there will be great benefit from appointing one or more Assistant Editors to help create and develop the *News* even further. Expressions of interest are sought from persons keen to join the hot-bed of pathological journalism. Did you see *Citizen Kane*? Can you see yourself with a green eye-shade and a mug of tea? Have you a file of compromising photographs of senior pathologists? Do you wish to represent distinguished pathologists as penguins? Have you got a blue pencil? Do you have ideas to interest, inform and entertain our readers? There is no person specification: would-be journalists of all kinds and kidney can apply. Please see the announcement on p. 18.

Pathology 2000

May 2000 in Birmingham draws near and the

organisers have included a fly-sheet within this issue for the information of readers. *Pathology 2000* is the largest scientific meeting and exhibition in the field of pathology ever staged in the UK. *AcP News* will be there; will you?

In this issue...

In this issue, we explore the pathological third age. Doctors Anderson, Ashworth and Cole – splendid senior pathological citizens all – give differing reports of how they enjoy their time after 'retirement.' Our own Chitra and Dennis write on the same theme, giving the issue an unusual thematic coherence. I am sure many readers will be seeking similar fulfilment soon. Certainly the role of itinerant locum is profitable and popular.

Amongst some learned and interesting articles, a brace of virulent polemicists raises some bracing storms in a tea cup. Dave Bisset raises the issue of unity in Pathology while plotting some revolution or other. The President of a college replies and a toady supplies the balancing view. Meanwhile, Mike McEvoy argues that men are no longer needed in Medicine. It seems we are unsuitable.

Whilst I do not myself agree with most or even any of the scurrilous points made, the joy of journalism is in reflecting what people are thinking and encouraging debate and comment. The 'Masked Pathologist' turns over a new leaf to please his many supporters and our distinguished panel of columnists is joined by a Fifth. Sr. Grigio croaks his last and Machiavelli is found. The poets have risen to new heights of significance but who is this lad? We hope lads and lasses everywhere will find *acp News* a good

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR CLINICAL CYTOLOGY Spring Tutorial – Cervical Cytology

Guy's Hospital, London
7 April 2000

Programme of lectures and workshops:

Invasive squamous carcinoma – Winifred Gray, Oxford
Borderline changes – Peter Smith, Liverpool
Atrophic smears – Lesley Turnbull, Liverpool

CME and CPD approved. Registration Fee £100 to include refreshments and lunch

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