

**Observations on the suggestions contained in the report of the Education Committee of the General Medical Council of 1869 / by the Medical Faculty of the University of Edinburgh.**

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# OBSERVATIONS

BY THE

MEDICAL FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF  
EDINBURGH,

ON THE

SUGGESTIONS CONTAINED IN THE REPORT OF THE  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL  
MEDICAL COUNCIL OF 1869.

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The Medical Faculty of the University of Edinburgh have carefully considered the Report on Medical Education and Examination by a Committee of the General Medical Council, and they beg to submit the following observations in regard to it:—

The object of the Report is to regulate the length of the Course of Study, to secure a minimum Curriculum for a Licence to practise, to ensure thorough Hospital work, and to provide for a uniform system of Examination for a Licence by means of a reduced number of Examining Boards.

All these points have engaged the serious attention of the Faculty.

## I.—PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF BOARDS OF EXAMINATION IN MEDICINE AND SURGERY.

The proposal to establish a new Examining Board in each division of the kingdom, and to render the passing that Board the only entrance-gate to medical practice, and all present titles merely honorary, is a revolution which can be justified only by positive proof that Medical Practice is in a low state in this country, that Medical Education is seriously defective,



and that what defects may be found to exist cannot be remedied through means of the General Medical Council. But, in the opinion of the Faculty, not one of these propositions is true. The condition of Medical Practice in all its branches is by no means unsatisfactory in the United Kingdom. The Faculty know that in Scotland it is eminently the reverse; and they have no reason to believe that it is otherwise in the other divisions of the country, notwithstanding the complaints and exaggerated clamour which have been raised in some quarters on this subject. Neither is Medical Education, or Medical Examination, in any serious respect, generally defective, or, where defective, incapable of being reformed through means now in existence. In particular, important improvements have been gradually introduced, both in Education and in the Examinations of the Licensing Boards, through the labours of the General Medical Council. It is, of course, too soon to see the full effect of the Council's proceedings on the face of Medical and Surgical Practice throughout the kingdom. But this Faculty look confidently to the result in good time; and they also beg to point attention to the facility with which these improvements have been carried through, as an earnest of the practicability of repairing what is still defective through the same agency, viz., the influence of the General Medical Council on the Universities and Incorporated Colleges.

There seems, then, no call for the very remarkable innovation suggested in the Report of the Committee of the Council. On the other hand, it seems plain to this Faculty, that the innovation could not be carried through without destruction to the Incorporated Colleges, and imminent danger to all Universities circumstanced as are the Universities of Scotland. Under the proposed new system, it is evident that the vastly greater proportion of the future members of the profession would rest content with the Licence obtained by the contemplated Examination before a conjunct Board. A few would still demand the Degree of a University, and a very few the Fellowship of an Incorporated College. But the country would lose the advantage of that peculiar stimulus which now exists by virtue of the variety of present means of access to practice, and which leads many students, instead of being content with a minimum



education, to aim at one of a much higher order, in order to connect themselves with a Corporation or University.

The members of the Faculty, however, are persuaded, that neither the General Medical Council, nor Her Majesty's Government, desire to bring either the Universities or the Incorporated Colleges into peril. Especially do they entertain this confidence, when they consider, *firstly*, that, as already stated, there is no such state of things in medical education or in medical practice as to demand that the Universities and Medical Corporations should be brought into danger; and, *secondly*, because the remedies for such defects as may be found to exist, are, in the opinion of the Faculty, simple and easy under the present medical organisation of the country.

The primary causes of the outcry which has arisen lately against the system of Medical Education in this country are that the education required by some of the present Licensing Boards is incomplete, and that the Examinations of some of them are essentially defective, inasmuch as the Boards alluded to can singly take cognisance of either Medicine or Surgery only, and not of both. For, as matters now stand, a man who has only a partial education, and has had only a partial examination, is entitled to admission on the Medical Register, and, when there, may practise any branch of the profession he pleases, or all of its branches.

Now, in the first place, the objections here started do not apply to the Universities of Scotland, in which every branch of medical and surgical learning and practice is taught, and from which no Graduate can issue without having been fully educated and fully examined in all. In regard to them, therefore, all that the Medical Council and the State can desire, is to have due security that the Universities do their duty.

It is different for the present with the Educational requirements and Examinations of the Boards of the Incorporated Colleges. But there is no insuperable obstacle to prevent these Bodies from providing the requisite remedy, in conformity with the provisions of the Medical Act of 1858. The three Medical Corporations of Scotland have already shown how this is to be done. It is merely required that all Candidates who appear before them shall be required to undergo



that conjunct Examination which is at present optional, and which is undergone, accordingly, by a proportion only, but a considerable proportion.

The members of the Faculty are unable to understand how the several Medical Incorporations of England and Ireland should have been unable, or unwilling, to do that which has been found so easy in Scotland. But the Medical Council, and the Legislature, can easily overcome, or provide for, the apparent difficulty by an enactment that no man shall be admitted on the register who has not been fully educated and examined, both in Surgery and in Physic, leaving the Incorporations to act singly or conjunctly, as may be thought best to suit their several constitutions.

• There remains for consideration a proper security for the Universities and Incorporated Colleges doing their duty. The supervision of their several systems of education may be wisely left to the General Medical Council. If greater powers be needed for that purpose,—which this Faculty, however, do not believe to be necessary,—let sufficient, but discreet, powers be granted. Experience hitherto has shown that, in matters of education, the Council can attain its wishes; and, if its action be gradual and slow, it has thus been also cautious; nor are caution and slowness entirely undesirable conditions in so important and difficult a task as that which the Council had to undertake.

The Medical Council have also made trial of the supervision of the Examinations of the Universities and Incorporations. Although improvements have thus been effected, much remains to be done in some quarters. It is very doubtful, however, that the members of Council can command sufficient time to maintain a thorough visitation and inspection of Examinations. The Faculty beg to recommend that this duty be entrusted to Inspectors specially appointed for the purpose, and receiving from Government a sufficient salary to induce men of ability and professional distinction to undertake the work. These Inspectors should report annually to the Medical Council, and through the Council to Government. A further improvement would be attained were the General Medical Council, in delivering the Inspector's Reports, to transmit also annually to



Government a report of their whole proceedings for the year. In this way all parties would act under a sense of responsibility; and all transactions would become matter of publicity in an authentic shape.

Before concluding these observations, the members of the Faculty must refer to the complaint still sometimes made, that a change is required in that part of the University system which makes their professors the examiners of the candidates of whom they have been previously the teachers. The practice, however, is not without its advantages; for it is plainly but fair to candidates that, on subjects admitting of such a variety of views on the part of teachers as the several branches of medical education, students should be examined according to the principles which they have been taught. Moreover, a fair attempt has been made to meet the objection in the Scottish Universities, by the addition to the Professorial Examiners of three Non-professorial Examiners in each Medical Faculty. If this number be judged insufficient, along with a more thorough system of inspection, the Universities have no objection that the number of such examiners shall be increased, provided the Government will incur the requisite cost; for it is well known that the revenues of the Scottish Universities could not bear the charge.

By the measures here suggested the Faculty are satisfied that, with little change in the Medical Act, and at a small charge to Government, every important object may be easily attained which is necessary for accomplishing a thorough and progressive advancement of medical education, medical examination, and medical and surgical practice throughout the country.

If the Medical Council, however, or her Majesty's Government, should judge it advisable to entertain further and more radical changes in education or examinations, the Faculty urgently call upon Government to make themselves correctly acquainted with the facts of the case, and with the opinions of the heads of the medical profession by means of a Royal Commission of Inquiry, before proceeding to institute measures which the Faculty cannot help regarding as of dubious utility, and fraught with danger to the public interests.

The University of Edinburgh has always maintained the



requirements for its Degrees above the standard of an ordinary licence to practise, and it seems unreasonable that a Diploma, necessitating higher qualifications on the part of its possessor, should not continue to carry with it the privileges of practice which are conferred by the inferior qualification.

## II.—COURSE OF STUDY.

[This part of the Report has not been finally revised. It will be forwarded at a future time.]





