

Farewell to the *Journal of the Irish Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons*

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The first issue of the *Journal of the Irish Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons (JICPS)* was published in 1963 under the editorship of T.G. Wilson. J.D.H. Widdess took over the editorship in 1968 and occupied the position for the next 14 years, thereby becoming the longest serving editor. I succeeded Widdess in 1973, and in 1976, Professor Kevin O'Malley, the present Registrar and Chief Executive Officer of the College, became editor. In 1986 I was appointed editor of the *Irish Medical Journal* until its closure two years later. When Kevin O'Malley resigned as editor of the *JICPS* in 1988, I again took up the reins of editorship until 1993, when I was succeeded by the present editor, Professor Austin Leahy.

These eleven years as editor of two of Ireland's medical journals were not without interest and, dare I say it, incident. With the *JICPS* joining forces with the *Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh*, I have been persuaded by the present editor to look back on the moments of editorship that delighted and dismayed me, and as such I will confine my observations to the years of my editorship.

A nostalgic review of the editions I brought to press has afforded me the opportunity to assess the value of the *JICPS* to the Colleges it has served and to the broader community of society, which the two Colleges serve. The value of the *JICPS* was not as a scientific organ, however ambitious the aspirations of successive editors may have been in this regard (which is not to say that it did not publish papers of scientific merit). Shortly after taking up office as editor for the first time I pleaded, quite naively as I now realise, with readers to submit their best papers to Irish medical journals, rather than submitting their work to overseas journals.¹ The value of the *JICPS* was rather as an archive of life – the life of two institutions over a 35-year period. Like a good Victorian diary the alterations to the buildings, the acquisition of new buildings, the inventory of statutory, portraiture and photography, the teaching of students, the appointment and demise of staff, the books that were being read, the menus for dinner and the after dinner speeches, the honours bestowed on dignitaries at home and abroad, the lists of visitors and the happenings of the institutions were reported and photographed for posterity. This is what the *JICPS* did best and the record of this life, albeit for a short period in the life of two institutions with considerable longevity, cannot be estimated in purely fiscal terms. The *JICPS* also excelled in facilitating publication of papers on the history of medicine and art, subjects not always welcome in the busy scientific journals.

Reportage of College events is replete with interesting statements; at the forty-third Inaugural Meeting of the Biological Society in 1973 attended by the then president of Ireland, the late Erskine Childers, Dr. Oscar Craig seconding the vote of thanks, commented that 'there should be no division between the pre-clinical and clinical stages of a student's education and the student should be introduced to the patient at the earliest possible moment.'² At the 1976 Charter Day Dinner, Professor Stanley McCollum giving the toast to the guests reverted to the practice followed at Tara many centuries earlier of grouping guests according to 'firstly, nobility and its various ranks, secondly, the druids and musicians, thirdly, judges, lawmakers and fools, fourthly, teachers and soothsayers, followed by merchants and buffoons, with physicians, jesters *et al.* coming last.'³

Issues of importance to the Colleges, which would not have found expression elsewhere, are aired from time to time. An example was the vexed issue of the College licentiate. In 1976 seven graduates wrote deploring the difficulty they faced in pursuing a post-graduate degree because of the diploma status of the Licentiate,⁴ and an editorial urged the College authorities to remove this academic incubus urgently.⁵ An interesting statistic emerged from this editorial: "The College contributes substantially to medical research in this country, expenditure by the College on research in 1969 being £67,700 as compared with £117,000 by University College, Dublin, and £22,700 by University College, Cork."⁵ In 1988 Stanley McCollum, past-president of the College, was able to write a review of the subject to mark 'the tenth anniversary of the acceptance of the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI) as a recognised College of the National University of Ireland (NUI)' whereby graduates could be awarded both a licentiate and a degree.⁶ Kevin O'Malley, writing in 1988 on the subject of research in Ireland stated that 'A future for research based on present attitudes and funding is unacceptable.'⁷ Few have done more over the years to change those attitudes and to reverse the dismal funding for research then available.

Unique events in the development of the Colleges are recorded, often with photographs that sometimes say more than words, and such occasions usually attracted editorial comment. A 1975 editorial applauded the College on establishing the first Faculty of Nursing in these islands and reported on the inauguration of the Faculty.⁸ Later in the same year the

College inaugurated the Department of the History of Medicine under the directorship of J.B. Lyons, who continues to occupy this position.⁹ The new Medical School extension was trumpeted in 1993 with a photographic pictorial memoir and an editorial, which though laudatory in tone, cautioned that 'the College must now devote attention to the development of its academic departments and without further delay achieve degree status for the qualifying examination so that RCSI graduates can further enhance the College's reputation in postgraduate medicine.'¹⁰ The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland Tercentenary Charter Celebrations are rightly attributed generous space with a photographic memoir giving colourful expression to the many celebrations, among which the highlights were the honorary conferring of fellowships on President Mary Robinson and HRH Princess Margriet of the Netherlands.¹¹

Personal memoirs allowed reappraisal of memorable events in the making of a life. Good examples are to be found in Denis Burkett's humble reflections entitled 'Unpromising Beginning',¹² and Harry O'Flanagan's catharsis for his part in the bombing of Dresden.¹³

Named College lectures were published and often make interesting reading. One, which I commend for re-reading, is the first Harry O'Flanagan Lecture delivered by the then president of Ireland, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, entitled 'An old tradition in a new mould'. In this lecture, Ó Dálaigh with remarkable erudition, pays tribute to the Danish lecturer, Björn Ibsen and to the 'indispensable *honorificandus*, Harry O'Flanagan and then traces the history of the College in presenting the 'new mould' in which he saw the College playing an increasing international role 'within the contemplation of humanitarian obligations as formulated at the highest international level'. He concluded: 'There are no better grounds on which we can meet other nations and demonstrate our own concern for peace and the betterment of mankind than in a common battle against disease.'¹⁴

Polemical editorials were welcomed. Who better in this regard than Petr Skrabanek, who writing on 'Erosion of Trust: Can doctors be dangerous to health?' warned that 'There is only one way to recapture the disappointing trust in doctors: to put the interest of the patients foremost and to share honestly with them our knowledge *and* ignorance.'¹⁵ Senator David Norris writing on 'The importance of the Adelaide Tradition' wrote: 'it is perfectly clear that whereas the Roman Catholic point of view, the Roman Catholic ethos, can be comfortably accommodated within what is known as the Protestant ethos in a situation such as that obtaining in the Adelaide Hospital, it is quite impossible to reverse that situation and maintain that the Protestant ethos can be accommodated at all within what is known as the Catholic ethical code.'¹⁶

During my years of editorship of the *JICPS* there was never any interference with my editorial freedom. In 1988 I wrote an editorial entitled 'The ethics of strike'

without any fear of editorial recrimination.¹⁷ This freedom to write in an editorial capacity on whatever seemed important, even if the views expressed were contrary to those of the Colleges, contrasted strikingly with an editorial on the same subject, entitled 'Strike and the Medical Profession,' which I wrote as editor of the *Irish Medical Journal* in 1987, criticising strike as a tactic in medical disputes.^{18,19} The expression of this view was contrary to that of the Irish Medical Organisation, which owned the *Irish Medical Journal*, and the outcome was closure of that journal in a manner that led to protests against the suppression of editorial freedom from prestigious international journals.²⁰⁻²²

My nostalgic glance back at the *Journal of the Irish Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons* must lead me to express sadness at its closure. Of course, the journal will have been losing money as do most journals of this kind, but was the cost not worthwhile? Did the *JICPS* not give the alumni and staff of the two colleges a sense of being, a sense of achieving, a sense of being collegiate? Did the *JICPS* not provide what cannot be valued if it is not there, namely an archive of the life of the Colleges over nearly 40 years? When the future history of the College comes to be written, the *JICPS* will prove to be an archive of inestimable value giving insight into the character of the two colleges that no minute book can give. Where now will the details of the buildings, their statuary and portraiture, the physical development of the Colleges be recorded? Where will the pictorial records of the annual dinners, the overseas meetings, the honorary conferrings, student graduations and fellowships be captured for all time? Where will the obituaries of presidents, professors, teachers and porters be poignantly written? Where now the repository for citations for fellowship, the cultural and historic papers that were attracted according to the mood of the time or the whimsy of the editor? I am not aware of the intimate details of the negotiations that have led to the demise of the *JICPS*, but I understand that a major benefit is seen as the wider circulation that will be achieved. I also understand that the news items of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, but *not* of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, will be incorporated into a newsletter to be inserted in the new journal for circulation to Irish subscribers only. Newsletters lack the archival permanency of a journal and thereby fail to serve the functions I have outlined. Moreover, the failure of the Royal College of Physicians to retain its voice in a joint journal must be seen as a retrograde step in the collaborative processes that could be so mutually advantageous to both institutions. The Colleges will be the poorer for disbanding what was clearly not appreciated as a valuable resource, and one, which – lets be frank – they could well afford. Indeed a quotation from an earlier issue of the *JICPS* is an apt epitaph: 'Perhaps it is a sign of exhilarating progress to have so much to do and think about in the present and the future, that effort in attending to the past, or even preserving the present for the future, is gruded.'⁹

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