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Why the 'Michael Lennard' Reception?

Who was Michael Lennard and why has the RCGP Severn Faculty named a reception event for new MRCPs after him?

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Michael Lennard was for about thirty years until his premature death in 1986 one of the most influential figures in general practice in the South Western region. He was well read and witty, with a shrewd mind and consistent common sense. He graduated in 1945 from Bristol University and, with his wife Joan, built up a practice from scratch on the large peripheral council housing estate in the challenging deprived areas of Hartcliffe and Withywood, with a branch surgery in Bishopsworth in Bristol¹. He worked throughout in partnership with Joan, who shared his interest in teaching and training. She was a GP trainer and tutor on the GP Vocational Training Scheme. She always gave him tremendous support in his personal, professional, and academic life.

He was awarded a Nuffield Travelling Fellowship to the USA in 1961 to study undergraduate and postgraduate training for family medicine and general practice. He was one of the youngest of the Gale Memorial Lecturers, delivering, in 1963, in the seventh annual lecture, a key contribution entitled 'Training for General Practice', in which he coined the term 'generalist'². This important lecture, which was subsequently published in the Journal of the College of General Practitioners, was based upon material gathered during the tenure of his Travelling Fellowship in 1961. His findings were also published in articles in the Lancet^{3,4} and a report to the Nuffield Foundation and the College of General Practitioners.

Michael became involved early in his career with the education committee of the South West Faculty of the RCGP and the education committee of the college council, which reported on special vocational training for general practice. This report set the scene for developments in the UK and many other countries. He was also a member of the subcommittee of the standing advisory committee that

wrote the Sheldon report on child welfare centres in 1967.

In 1972 he was appointed the first Regional Adviser in general practice in the South Western region. He thus became the first general practitioner in the region to hold an appointment at either of the two universities of Exeter & Bristol. He went on to be elected chairman of the South West RCGP Faculty Board and was for many years an RCGP examiner.

Michael made important contributions in developing a structure and system of operating vocational training for general practice. He set up the framework of Vocational Training Schemes, half day releases and training practices in the region. He tackled the geographical problems of the region by establishing local subcommittees and encouraging the appointment of a second Regional Adviser, Dr Denis Pereira Gray, in Exeter in 1975. He presided over this system for exactly ten years and retired in 1983.

For many years he strove for a department of general practice at Bristol University and actively promoted it. He learnt just before he died, prematurely, age 63, in 1986, of the appointment of one of his former trainees, Dr Michael Whitfield, as the first senior lecturer in charge of the new department of general practice.

Because he was, really, the founder of vocational training for general practice in the South West, a Michael Lennard Memorial Fund was established in 1995 by his family, friends and colleagues, to commemorate him. Initially the fund was used for an annual, named, competitive prize for a general practitioner trainee from the Severn and Tamar RCGP Faculties. The prize was awarded for a piece of written work relating to general practice by a trainee e.g. essay, audit, professional learning plan or some reflective work.

In 2005 the Severn Faculty decided to use its annual share of the fund for a named event, the Michael Lennard

Reception, for all new successful MRCP candidates, to welcome them into the faculty, to celebrate their success and to honour his memory. Michael's widow Joan has, until recent years, kindly presented the welcome certificate to the new faculty members. This is now a well established and successful event. For the past five years it has been linked with the Severn Postgraduate Medical Education's School of Primary Care MDU GP Trainee Excellence Awards as the finale of the three year GP Speciality training programme.

I knew Michael and worked for many years in the same health centre in Hartcliffe where he practiced. I had the privilege of inheriting some his patients and consulting in his old consulting room. He also introduced me to the Bristol Medico Chirurgical Society (the Med Chi). It is remarkable to reflect upon how far general practice in the South West has come, since Michael first took up the cudgels and started fighting for the recognition of the discipline he loved.

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