ON THE VALUE OF PRECEPTORSHIP TRAINING

PART I

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One must learn
By doing the thing; for though you
think you know it
You have no certainty, until you try.
Sophocles (496?-406 BC)

For a number of years now, Dalhousie
Medical School has conducted a general
practice preceptorship, thereby exposing
fourth year medical students to the trials
and tribulations of a busy general practice
for a week's duration. During this time, the
"eager" student observes, assists, discusses
and yea advises his Preceptor on the mana-
ger and conduct of his practice. Work-
ing along with the doctor, one finds the hours
to be long, the work insurmountable, the
problems endless but the Art satisfying.

It is axiomatic that most medical schools
are centres of diagnostic and medical acumen.
Students learn and study about a myriad of
entities which include common and the rare,
but oft time too much emphasis is placed
on that which is covered only by the "small
print" of medical texts. The preceptorship
affords an all too brief opportunity to study
the common things - that which afflicts the
population generally.

During our medical education we have
no teaching in the management of an office
on the conduct of a general practice. The
preceptorship offers a golden period in which
to see, discuss and learn how these things
are accomplished. The matter of keeping
accurate records and being able to find them,
appointments, billing, arranging one's daily
activities is taught and practised.

Most will agree that the prime aim of
the Dalhousie Medical School is to graduate
doctors fully capable to enter general prac-
tice. To do this without firsthand knowledge
is pointless. Some medical schools have a
much longer preceptorship than we have
here at Dalhousie, even going as far as to
have the student live in with a general prac-
titioner in a rural area.

Personally, I do not think this would
be acceptable to most students. The pre-
ceptorship is an integral part of our medical
education. There should be no thought of
abolishing it, and to increase it without
letting the student take a more active part in
the patient care will border on the monotony.
It was Sir William Osler who said:
"A well trained sensible family doctor
is one of the most valuable assets
in a community, worth today, as in
Homer's time, many another man . . .
Free men, live lives of more devoted
self sacrifice".
The value of preceptorship lies not in
what it teaches us but in what we learn from
it.

PART II

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Immediately following the last World
War there was a tremendous surge within the
medical profession towards specialization.
The dedicated, hard working g.p., in his
quest for greater knowledge and scientific

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