

EDITORIAL

PROGRESS IN MEDICAL EDUCATION AT THE FIJI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Fiji's Minister for Health, the Honourable Edward Beddoes made an announcement in the House of Representatives on 6 December, 1979 that in October this year the USP suggested that a joint committee consisting of members of the University and the Ministry of Health and Fiji School of Medicine officials study the recommendations contained therein to ascertain the various consequences of the report if it is accepted.

— Government will then study this submission and make a firm decision and I personally trust that the recommendations will be of such a nature that Government will be able to award degrees to the graduates at the earliest possible time". The announcement follows an earlier decision of the Cabinet to approach the University of the South Pacific to award degrees to the graduates of the Fiji School of Medicine. The Government in early 1978 had asked the University of the South Pacific to investigate the proposal to award degrees.

During October 1978, at the invitation of the University, a WHO team of Consultants reviewed the staffing, resources and facilities at the School of Medicine. This team of Deans submitted their report to the University in February 1979. The Senate and the Council of the University of the South Pacific agreed in principle to award the degrees on an external basis provided the recommendations of the experts are implemented. The report has suggested strengthening of staff and improvement of facilities and resources.

This interesting turn in Medical Education, which augurs well for the status of the Fiji Medical graduates, is a consequence of a series of events since 1966. Sir Charles Morris in his report of the Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific commenting on the Fiji School of Medicine, said, "Education work is becoming a little more advanced and comprehensive with every year that passes and no one can doubt that in due time, and appropriate for the circumstances and needs of the region it will become a full professional and graduate School of Medicine". Sir Norman Alexander's report on the University of the South Pacific (1967) suggested that there should be semi-autonomous institutions within the frame work of the University. These institutions of which Fiji School of Medicine would be one, would award diplomas. The USP Commission on Medical Education (Irvine at al) reported to the USP Council in October 1971. All FSM operations were recommended to be incorporated in a School of Health Sciences of University of the South Pacific; the medical course was recommended to be increased to six years and raised to

degree level; a 2 year "condensed" MB course was recommended for existing diploma holders; the Pharmacy course was recommended to be restarted; a three year Health Officer course was recommended to be started to train health workers to undertake first line clinical care and public health duties. The USP Council received the report and referred it to an ad hoc committee to investigate Government reactions and USP financial implications if it was to be implemented. The committee had not met by the end of 1972. In September 1972 the University Council authorised the Vice-Chancellor to ask Fiji Government to request the World Health Organisation to supply a Consultant to carry out the term of reference of the ad hoc committee. However, things remained very much in the dark as to the outcome of "Irvine Report". It is believed that the "Irvine Report" had "to be shelved" because of the high cost involved in the implementation of its recommendations. A fresh move by the incumbent Principal of the Fiji School of Medicine was made in 1977, wherein he submitted to the Advisory Council of the School a proposal for a degree course. The Advisory Council endorsed the proposal and submitted it to the Minister for Health. The proposal was for Fiji School of Medicine to grant a Bachelors degree in Medicine. However, because of differences in the profession on the nature of the degree whether it should be a MD or MBBS the Cabinet, while sympathetic to award of a degree in Medicine to FSM graduates, through the Minister for Health invited the USP to investigate the proposal.

The announcement by the Minister for Health at this time is very encouraging and commendable. The Vice Chancellor Dr J Maraj and the Senate of the University are to be congratulated for their decision and for their sincerity and cooperation in their efforts to upgrade the status of the qualification of the FSM graduates. The University as a degree granting body would require the following criteria to be fulfilled:

- (i) that curricula and prescription for courses involved in the programmes of study are approved by the University.
- (ii) that level and quality of staffing for teaching these programmes are satisfactory to the University
- (iii) that arrangements are made for provision of approved external assessors to report to the University on academic standards of teaching and of the courses.

Much progress have been made in the Fiji School of Medicine since the WHO Consultants report was made available to the Senate of the University. Considerable improvements have been made in upgrading and replacement of equipment in the Physiology and Biochemistry laboratories. A new teaching laboratory in Pathology is now in operation; a new clinical library with an addition of over 500 new volumes was opened this year at the basement of the Hoodless House complex.

Upgrading of the Medical course to degree level would mean recruitment of more staff and improvement of facilities. The Fiji Medical Association appeals to friendly nations and commercial organisations and International organisations to assist the Fiji School of Medicine to recruit required manpower and basic resources so that it could meet the requirements laid down by the WHO Consultants before a Bachelors degree in Medicine could be awarded by the University of the South Pacific.

Speech by the Minister for Health, Honourable Edward James Beddoes, Fiji.

It gives me great pleasure to be here again this afternoon to honour the young people who, after their various periods of training, have emerged, ready to serve and to service the health needs of their community. For some of you it has been five years since you left school, for others perhaps only two, but irrespective of the length of time it has taken you to attain the level of competence you possess to-day you should be proud of your achievement and you have every justification for being so. You have persevered and worked hard and you deserve your reward.

For those of you who are graduating, to-day will mark one of the milestones in your life. It is a time to sit back and reflect on the love and nurturing that your parents, relatives and friends have provided for you and to acknowledge the role that your teachers in school and lecturers and staff at medical school have played in making you what you are. I am sure that you feel a sense of indebtedness and deep gratitude to all those along the line who have added to your knowledge and who have influenced, moulded and consolidated your thoughts, feelings and attitudes to give you a mature outlook on life in general.

It is difficult to stereotype the true health worker but I believe that a necessary characteristic is an altruistic attitude — a record for others as a principle of all actions. Whether you become a doctor in a rural hospital or a dietician in a city hospital make sure that your first priority is to fulfilling the health needs of those who seek your help. Health care delivery is a **service** and you should be always mindful of this fact. Every member of a health team from the consultant to the nurse to the dental therapist, has been assigned a role in the society in order to serve that society. No doubt there are numerous opportunities that will arise for exploiting such a role but your conviction and your training will hopefully suppress and overcome any desires to do so.

Integrity is a word that one hears and reads about

often. I will remind you that it means wholeness, soundness, uprightness and honesty. The medical profession prides itself on the integrity of its members. There are various codes of ethics, both written and unwritten, which you will be expected to maintain and adhere to. Moral fibre is a quality that you must all possess in order to function correctly according to society's expectations. Doctors and other health workers have unique privileges attached to their respective professions. Within minutes of meeting a person for the first time you will learn of the most intimate details about that person. Sometimes you may even know more than that persons spouse. Under no circumstances must you divulge this information. In other words, confidentiality must be observed at all times. The patient has put his trust in you and in return you must honour that trust.

Society also has many non-medical expectations of health workers. Especially in rural areas you will be regarded as a leader in the community. Whatever your personal feelings are I would suggest that it would be extremely difficult to shrug off this role. Therefore, I would ask that you conduct yourselves as model citizens, in whatever communities you may find yourselves and ensure that behaviour is exemplary. As members of your profession I would ask that you conduct yourselves to bring your profession and yourselves credit and honour. Wherever you may be, whatever you may be doing remember the saying —

“Do What You Do, Do Well”

it is as applicable now as it was on the day it was first coined. To give of one's best at all times is a noble virtue which you must all adopt to steer you through your chosen professions.

As I have already stated the medical profession brings with it many privileges and perks which are just rewards for a job well done. In addition to emoluments and the prestige that your position provides there will be the unequalled satisfaction obtained from treating a fellow human for a disease condition or from