

A NOTE FROM THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION

Prepared by the Commonwealth Foundation

THE FOUNDATION'S AIMS

The Commonwealth Foundation was established in 1966 by Heads of Government to promote closer professional cooperation within the Commonwealth. In almost fifteen years of operation its Trustees have approved grants totalling close to £6 million in furtherance of its aims. It has assisted some 4,000 professionals and sub-professionals to visit other Commonwealth countries to attend conferences, seminars, workshops, courses, etc; for advisory and study visits; and for training attachments. Other major Foundation activities include support for Commonwealth professional associations and professional centres; short-term bursary schemes in cooperation with other organisations; lectureships by distinguished leaders in selected areas of specialisation; and the flow of professional information.

2. Medicine and related disciplines have continued to be accorded high priority by the Foundation. Although much of the assistance has been provided to professionals in applied medical research and practice, in recent years Trustees have made an increasing number of awards to paramedicals such as radiographers, physiotherapists, laboratory technicians and pharmacists, who occupy key middle-level positions in the health services of Commonwealth countries. Primary health care has also been high in their order of interests.

3. The Foundation has close links with the Medical Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the advice and assistance of the Medical Adviser has been often sought in assessing grant applications in the health field.

THE EXPANDED MANDATE

4. Commonwealth Heads of Government, meeting in Lusaka in August 1979, widened the Foundation's mandate, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Relationships between the Official and the Unofficial Commonwealth, to include culture, information, social welfare, rural development and the role of women. In order to make good the effects of inflation and to permit expansion in the Foundation's activities, the target for the Foundation's income was set at £1.1 million (as against £670,000 in 1978/79), although it was recognised that realisable resources were unlikely to exceed £900,000 in 1979/80. The contributions of member governments to the Foundation's income were under £740,000 in that year, underlining the severe resource constraints which affect organisations like the Foundation.

5. With so small an income and so broad a Commonwealth constituency of interest, Trustees have had to spread their largesse thin. Thus, priority has generally been accorded to pan-Commonwealth and regional activities with the broadest professional benefit. At the national

level, preference has been given to schemes likely to promote inter-disciplinary cooperation. As to individual grantees, Trustees have tended to favour younger men and women, working in intellectual isolation, who have demonstrated their readiness to contribute to the grass-roots development of their countries. Above all, Trustees have tried to promote activities in the professional field which are not normally covered by larger trusts and aid agencies.

ASSISTANCE IN THE MEDICAL FIELD

Pan-Commonwealth activities

6. The Foundation has continued to support the four main Commonwealth professional associations in the broad health field: the Commonwealth Medical Association, the Commonwealth Nurses Federation, the Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association and the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf.

7. Last year Trustees decided that the time had come for an evaluation of Commonwealth professional associations, particularly those which had been receiving assistance from the Foundation. Mr. Richard Symonds, a former United Nations aid administrator, was appointed to undertake the task. His report was submitted to the Board earlier this year and Trustees are expected to formulate guidelines for the long- and short-term funding of these associations at their next meeting.

International conferences

8. By and large, Trustees have tended not to accord high priority to such conferences, but in exceptional cases grants have been made to support the attendance of a limited number of Commonwealth Third World country participants at meetings on themes such as medical and biological illustration, infant nutrition and diarrhoeal diseases, primary surgical care, pediatric surgery, cardio-vascular epidemiology, rehabilitation, medical laboratory sciences, aviation and space medicine, biomedical engineering and traditional Asian medicine.

Regional cooperation

9. Several grants have been made in recent years in support of regional seminars and workshops in the health field, as illustrated by the following examples: in the Caribbean region for projects relating to environmental health, rehabilitation therapy, dental care, and first aid; in Africa to support seminars for surgeons and physicians working in remote areas in East and Central Africa; and in the Asia/Pacific region to finance attendance at meetings on clinical biochemistry, burns care, radiography, cancer, neurology, gastroenterology and anaesthesiology.

National activities

10. At the national level, Trustees have attached considerable importance to the development of professional centres which serve as focal points for the national professional bodies in the countries concerned. Substantial assistance has been provided to finance the construction of purpose-built buildings or to rent suites of offices to house centre secretariats. In a number of countries, the medical and dental associations are active members of the professional centres.

11. It is not generally the practice for Trustees to support activities

solely within one country unless it is to finance the attendance of resource persons from other Commonwealth countries. Examples of the latter are the meetings arranged by the Spastics Society of India at different centres, which were attended last year by resource persons from Australia and Britain; training courses arranged by the Singapore Physiotherapy Association assisted by course tutors from Australia and New Zealand; and the weekend medical seminars in Malawi intended to bring isolated up-country doctors and paramedical personnel into closer contact with headquarters staff.

Study visits and training attachments

12. Study visits and training attachments constitute an important means by which professional cooperation among Commonwealth countries can be achieved, as illustrated by the following examples:

- (a) visits to India and Sri Lanka to study gastroenteritis problems by the Professor of Clinical Virology, St. Thomas's Hospital Medical School;
- (b) training attachment in microsurgery in Australia for a plastic surgeon from India;
- (c) study visit to the UK by a senior psychiatrist from India;
- (d) training attachment in endoscopy in the UK for a medical officer from Mauritius;
- (e) study visit to the UK by the Dean of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria.

Advisory visits

13. The aims of these visits are to enable experts to offer on-the-spot advice in their areas of specialisation. For instance, the Professor of Neurosurgery of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore, India, visited Malaysia and Tonga earlier this year to survey local neurological disorders in general and the incidence of strokes in the young, and to share his experience with his counterparts and medical students in the two countries; two senior lecturers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine visited four Caribbean countries to establish close working links between that institution and the University of the West Indies; four specialists from Canada and the UK will pay visits to the Shree Chitra Tirunal Medical Centre in Trivandrum, India, this year and next.

Courses

14. Attendance at short, specialised courses in the UK have, in rare instances, been supported with Foundation grants; for example, a lecturer in pathology from India attended a course on the liver; and the Professor of Child Health of the University of Papua New Guinea attended a course in perinatal pediatrics. Both courses were arranged by the British Council.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Lectureships

15. The Foundation supported a lectureship in burns care and surgery by Mr. Douglas Jackson (formally of the Birmingham Accident Hospital, UK) covering centres in India and Sri Lanka. Plans have now been finalised for a lectureship in nursing education by Dr. Helen K. Mussalem (Executive Director, Canadian Nurses Association) which would include visits to The Gambia, Ghana, Malta, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Bursary schemes

16. There are two bursary schemes in the health field: first, a scheme jointly funded with Guinness Overseas Ltd. for paramedical personnel from the Caribbean region to attend three-month courses in tropical community medicine and health at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine; second, a scheme for medical electives from Commonwealth countries launched this year. The latter is intended for senior medical students of university medical schools in the Commonwealth to assist them to spend their elective periods in other Commonwealth countries, particularly those of the Third World.

Anglo-Australian study project on medicine relating to sport

17. The Foundation, in collaboration with the Menzies Memorial Trust, has launched a scheme, initially for a two year period, to offer short-term awards for British-Australian exchanges for medical graduates in the field of medicine relating to sport.

Bureau for Overseas Medical Service

18. A two-year grant has been made this year to support the establishment of a Bureau for Overseas Medical Service at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The aim is to establish a register of medical posts overseas, particularly in the Commonwealth, together with a list of British and other Commonwealth doctors who have worked or are prepared to work overseas.

Indo-British exchange visits on problems of cancer

19. A three-year grant was made this year to continue to support exchange visits on problems of cancer, between staff members of the Royal Marsden Hospital in the UK and the Tata Memorial Centre in Bombay, India. The scheme, initially launched in 1970, has made a major contribution to the successful treatment of children suffering from lymphatic leukaemia in India. It is now proposed to extend the scheme to enable cancer clinicians from Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka to attend courses being organised at the Tata Centre.

Advisory visits by specialists to South Pacific countries

20. Since 1971 Trustees have supported a series of short-term visits to Commonwealth countries in the South Pacific by New Zealand medical specialists. The programme is arranged in collaboration with the New Zealand Postgraduate Medical Federation.

Scheme for exchange of examiners

21. The Royal College of Physicians (UK) has initiated a scheme, with financial assistance from the Foundation, for an exchange of examiners at postgraduate level between the UK and developing countries and also

between the developing countries themselves. Examiners from Hong Kong, Nigeria, Singapore and the West Indies are among those participating in the first year.

Medical laboratory manual for tropical countries

22. This manual is under preparation with a subsidy from the Foundation, and will be published shortly. It is intended to serve as the basis for a training programme for laboratory technicians working in district hospitals and health centres in Third World countries.

Advisory visits to Malawi and Seychelles by British ENT consultant

23. Mr. Leslie Salmon, former Ear, Nose and Throat Consultant, Guy's Hospital, UK, has been making annual visits to Malawi since 1970 and also to Seychelles since 1976, financed by the Foundation. Last year he included Mauritius in his itinerary. The main aims of his visits have been to advise the Government of Malawi, to lecture to medical and nursing staffs, and to examine and operate on referred cases. He also inspects the Foundation-sponsored Deaf Teacher Training School on the outskirts of Blantyre, and examines the increasing number of children now in residence.

PUBLICATIONS

24. The Foundation has published Occasional Papers on subjects of special concern to professionals. The reports on the two lectureships referred to earlier will be published in this series. Trustees have provided financial support for launching or subsidising two professional journals: Tropical Doctor and a bilingual English-French Journal of Tropical Dentistry. The Commonwealth Caribbean Directory of Aid Agencies was published in 1978 and the Commonwealth African Directory of Aid Agencies in 1979. A companion volume for Asia and the Pacific is under preparation. These directories include references to agencies which provide aid in all fields, not exclusively health.

BOOKS, FILMS AND EQUIPMENT

25. In exceptional instances, awards have been made for the purchase and supply of medical books and journals (for the Malawi Medical Association); training films (Cyprus School of Nursing); and equipment (Orthopaedic Centre in Madras, India). Substantial assistance has been provided for the distribution of the book on Poliomyelitis: A Guide for Developing Countries by Professor R.L. Huckstep (University of New South Wales) to hospitals in remote areas in Commonwealth Third World countries.

DENTISTRY

26. Although there is no Commonwealth professional association in dentistry, grants have been made from time to time to support professional cooperation in this field. For instance, grants were made: to enable the Caribbean Atlantic Regional Dental Health Association to organise Dental Health Weeks in St. Lucia and St. Vincent; for a study visit to Singapore, Malaysia and Australia by the former President of the Sri Lanka Dental Association; and for attendance of a senior

lecturer from New Zealand at a seminar in endodontics in Fiji.

27. In June this year, the Foundation supported the attendance of a number of dental surgeons from Commonwealth Third World countries at the Centenary Celebrations of the British Dental Association in the UK. During their stay here a Symposium on "Dental education and dental public health in developing countries" was arranged for the participants by the International Dental Federation. At this meeting, tentative proposals for the formation of a Commonwealth Dental Association were also discussed.