

EDITORIAL

Professionalism and Excellence in Scottish Medicine – Building the Momentum

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The Scottish Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee (SMASAC) Report: *Promoting Professionalism and Excellence in Scottish Medicine*¹ was published in the *SMJ* as a supplement to the February 2009 edition. This brief article provides some further background and an update on early progress.

As reflected in the Chief Medical Officer's Foreword, the SMASAC Report provides an optimistic view of the future development of NHS Scotland, as seen through the eyes of Specialty Advisers. There is a strong commitment to medical education and training; to a vibrant research infrastructure; an evidence-based approach to developing policy and delivering patient care; and to optimal team and partnership based working practices. Looking ahead, there is a clear view that doctors should rise to the occasion and develop their role as champions for improved health and better health services for patients, and to make good on their enduring commitment to training the next generation of medical professionals. Clinical leadership at all levels of the service, and meaningful engagement with management are also seen as essential to drive forward this challenging agenda.

The SMASAC Report posed the question: *Who builds the future?* (Section 7.3) – and pointed first to the individual and collective responsibilities of doctors themselves, reflecting the duties of a doctor as articulated by the GMC in: *Good Medical Practice*.² Other organisations are also seen as key, in addition to the GMC, including: the Scottish Government, NHS Boards, Medical Schools, Postgraduate Deaneries, Royal Colleges and Faculties, and the BMA. The roles and responsibilities of Government and professional organisations were also highlighted in the earlier (2005) Royal College of Physicians of London Report: *Doctors in Society*,³ which produced a list of recommendations for action.

Encouragingly, many of these recommendations are underway or evolving – for example, the renewed emphasis on the doctor as professional in the latest revision of the GMC publication: *Tomorrow's Doctors*,⁴ mirrored in ongoing curricular reform in all Scottish Medical Schools, underpinned by *The Scottish Doctor*.⁵ Postgraduate Deaneries are also developing new postgraduate/specialty training where professionalism is being promoted anew, recognising the fine balance that needs to be struck for promoting values and attitudes, as well as, learning skills and new knowledge, for safe and effective professional practice. Scottish Colleges and Faculties are also active – to give two examples: (1) in *Surgeons' News*,⁶ April 2009 (of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh) there are several themed articles on professionalism (patient safety, regulation and teaching); (2) the Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland is presently focusing on professional values and attitudes as part of their development of the 'essence of general practice'.⁷ Others, including Colleges⁸ and Faculties, the Scottish Government Health Directorates (SGHD)⁹ and NHS Education for Scotland (NES)¹⁰ are also actively promoting clinical leadership. Additionally, the Academy of Medical Royal

Colleges and Faculties in Scotland, which includes both BMA and patient representation, agreed at its March 2009 meeting, to plan a combined Workshop Meeting on Promoting Professionalism and Excellence (provisionally scheduled for Autumn 2009), as another tangible marker of moving forward this important agenda.

It will be important to continue to build on this momentum and to promote further progress - for, as cited in *Doctors in Society*³: "Professionalism lies at the heart of being a good doctor. It sets a standard for what patients should expect from their medical practitioners.....it is an ideal to be sustained."

Footnote: The SMASAC Report¹ was based on a questionnaire sent to all Scottish Medical Advisers by the Chief Medical Officer and reflects their views of progress achieved, challenges to be resolved and future aspirations for NHS Scotland. The responses to the questionnaire were collated and the Report itself was initially drafted by Dr Louise Smith, Senior Medical Officer, SGHD. Prof Lewis Ritchie holds the James Mackenzie Chair of General Practice, University of Aberdeen; Dr Cameron Howie is Associate Medical Director, Surgery and Anaesthetics, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

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