

HISTORICAL ARTICLE

The Scottish Paediatric Society

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At a time when Paediatrics was a part of general medicine and children were treated by adult physicians in the British Isles and across Europe, Scottish paediatrics was evolving as a speciality in its own right. In July 1922, ten Scottish Physicians established the first formal paediatric professional group and gave it the modest name "Edinburgh and Glasgow Paediatric Club". Members of the Club met twice a year alternating between the two cities. The format of their meeting stood the test of time and bears a great resemblance to the current Scottish Paediatric Society (SPS) meetings, consisting of case presentations in the first part and research papers in the second part of the meeting.

Problems of childhood malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies were important health issues, in contrast to those of modern day paediatrics dealing with extreme prematurity and survival of babies born under 24 weeks gestation, as presented in our most recent meeting in 2009. The luxury of modern day technology was not available at the Club and paediatricians had to argue their views based on clinical features and their own experience and acumen. During the early years of the Club, participants ended the meeting with a dinner at the homes of their hosts, but soon the numbers of participants increased and the dinner moved to hotels from 1927.

The Club influenced the development of paediatrics into a speciality and Leonard Findlay was appointed as the first Professor of Child Health in Glasgow in 1924 followed by the appointment of Charles McNeil to the chair of Child Life and Health in Edinburgh in 1931. John Craig was appointed to the chair in Aberdeen in 1947 and John Henderson at St. Andrew's in 1951. The Club realised the importance of social factors on child health and in 1942 it approached children's welfare departments for closer co-operation on child health matters.

In 1946, the Club evolved into "The Scottish Paediatric Society", and a constitution was approved limiting the number of members to 30, however the numbers were increased over the years to 40 in 1952, 50 in 1955 and 60 in 1962 until it became pointless to restrict the number. Geoffrey Fleming was elected as the first president, and George Montgomery the secretary and treasurer in 1947. A year later paediatric surgeons were admitted to the membership of the Society, but soon the surgeons followed the paediatricians lead and formed their own society.

The changes in delivery of paediatric services, the changing needs of trainees and the many reforms of the health services starting with the creation of the NHS in 1948, the introduction of community child health and later community paediatrics, and the emergence of the need for organ system specialisation have contributed to the development of the SPS into a major voluntary organisation which all paediatricians in Scotland can identify as a source of professional belonging and education. The membership of the SPS is now open to all medical professionals who are committed to a career in paediatrics or in specialities where they deliver care and treatment to children whether mental health, surgery, radiology, pathology or general practice.

In recent years the SPS has worked closely with and achieved partnership with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) and the Scottish Association for Community Child Health in making the St Andrew's Day Symposium a truly major paediatric event in Scotland allowing young paediatricians to present their work in a supporting environment. Abstracts of the SPS meetings were published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood and later in The European Journal of Pediatrics. From this issue the Scottish Medical Journal will give home to the abstracts of the SPS meetings.

The stature of the SPS has grown over the years and high profile speakers invited to the St Andrew's Day Symposia have included presidents of the RCPCH and experts from across the UK. In 2007 Princess Anne addressed the Society.

Despite its growth in membership (to now just under 300) and the sophistication of its operations, embracing 21st century technology and having a foothold in the world wide web (www.scotpaedsoc.co.uk), the SPS continues to provide a unique and friendly forum for the exchange of information and ideas about the health and welfare of children.

Acknowledgement

This article contains historical data and quotations from articles written by Stanley Graham (SPS Booklet, 1962) and Eric Coleman (SPS Diamond Jubilee booklet, 1997).