
EDITORIAL

The GP's Role in Primary Health Care

Friday and Saturday, 16 and 17 February 1990 saw 35 people together in Johannesburg engrossed in discussion. Representatives from MASA, NAMDA, the Department of National Health and Population Development, the Faculty of General Practice of the College of Medicine of SA and heads of university departments of Family Medicine all met with the organisers of the workshop: the SA Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care and the National General Practitioners Group of MASA. With generous sponsorship from ICI we were able to get people together from all over the country to discuss this contentious and vital issue.

At the end of the two days we were amazed at the way in which we had spent our time in straight forward debate. For many years such workshops had to budget time and energy to discuss the wider political problems of the country, if you could get them together at all ! Perhaps the real possibility for meaningful resolution that now exists, has given us space to focus on lesser issues.

In essence, we were meeting to make a contribution to the debate at a time when the Department of Health is seriously showing signs of making practical their commitment to Primary Health Care. The meeting was constituted so as to obtain as wide as possible a spectrum of positions. From the outset we discussed, in small groups, such statements as; "PHC is second class, non-comprehensive health care that will only perpetuate discrimination against the poor and will only meet the needs seen as essential by the government" or "Private GPs can only make a minimal contribution to a national PHC programme, as only

a minority of the population can afford their services".

At the end of the workshop and much constructive debate, we agreed to draw up two documents, a full report of the workshop and a Declaration which will hopefully have the support of all the constituent bodies. The Declaration will then be used to make known our collective opinion about the role of the doctor in PHC to government officials and politicians of all persuasions.

It will be rash of me to prejudge what this Declaration will contain. We did however seem to agree that there is a definite and positive role for the doctor to play within the plans that the government has for the PHC team. We all look forward to continue and develop the positive communication that has begun with the Department of Health on this matter.

Sam Felsen