

EDITORIAL

College of Ophthalmologists

On Thursday the fourteenth of April 1988 the founding of a College of Ophthalmologists in the United Kingdom was officially marked by the affixing of the Great Seal to a Royal Charter graciously granted by Her Majesty The Queen in response to a Petition from the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom and the Faculty of Ophthalmologists. The granting of a Royal Charter incorporating a College of Ophthalmologists marks a significant step in the evolution of British Ophthalmology.

As we all know the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom has passed its Centenary and for over 100 years in its annual Congress the Society has acted as a focal point in the United Kingdom for the interchange and dissemination of new ideas and developments in the practice of Ophthalmology and in related sciences.

The Faculty of Ophthalmologists has a shorter history developing in 1945 from such earlier bodies as the Council of British Ophthalmologists and the Association of British Ophthalmologists. During the 43 years of its existence the Faculty of Ophthalmologists has played an important although often not fully appreciated role in many areas of vital importance to the speciality of ophthalmology in the UK. As examples, the Faculty has spoken on behalf of the ophthalmic profession in relation to Government legislation on health matters, through the various Royal Colleges in relation to the interaction of ophthalmology with other surgical and medical disciplines and through such bodies as the General Optical Council in relation to our sister profession of optometry. The Faculty has played an important part in establishing criteria for the staffing and working practice of National Health Service departments of ophthalmology.

In spite of the important and varied activities of the Society and the Faculty there are a number of areas where the establishment of a College uniting and expanding the activities of the two bodies are likely to be of benefit to the speciality.

Until now the training of ophthalmologists in the United Kingdom and the conduct of professional examinations has been the remit of the surgical Royal Colleges in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The requirements in terms of training and eligibility to sit the various Fellowship examinations vary greatly from College to College as, indeed, does the format and content of the examinations. The College of Ophthalmologists intends to establish its own training criteria and its own examinations making these appropriate to the needs of the ophthalmologist in training. The establishment of a College gives ophthalmology the right to be represented on many important Government and other committees where the views of the profession can be expressed directly. We have been grateful to the surgical Royal Colleges in advancing the views of the surgical disciplines as a whole but, at times, have felt the need to have the ophthalmologists' views separately identified. We would hope, however, that we will still be able to work closely with the surgical Royal Colleges when an interdisciplinary view is required.

With the establishment of a College, ophthalmology in the United Kingdom achieves an independence and an enhanced status. We also accept an increased responsibility for all matters relating to the practice of our speciality and the direction of its future development lies firmly in our own hands.

Those of us who have been involved in the establishment of the College are excited to see it in existence. We are confident that this new development will be greatly to the advantage of ophthalmology in the United Kingdom, and not least to our patients who are our immediate and ultimate responsibility.

Wallace S. Foulds
President