

From the President
Dr Richard Heron MB ChB FRCP FFOM FAcOEM

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Dear Colleague

As we approach the turn of the year, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on 2014 and more importantly look forward to 2015. It is hard to believe that it is only just over six months since I assumed office as President at the AGM back in the spring. At that meeting, I set out the objectives that I will be prioritising during my tenure as President. We must relentlessly focus our efforts to reinvigorate the specialty by increasing the number of doctors training in occupational medicine; we must influence government and other professional bodies to ensure the specialty is funded sufficiently; we must strengthen the evidence base to demonstrate how high quality occupational health provision offers outstanding value to employers; and we must build on the success of SEQOHS to ensure that it continues to be recognised as the national standard for occupational health.

It is clear that we are an ageing specialty, as Niall Dickson highlighted in the recent GMC 'State of Medical Education' report. Conversely, demand for high quality occupational health advice is set to rise considerably as employers and healthcare professionals alike seek to meet the unprecedented demands placed on the system by an ageing population. We are also seeing the rise in chronic conditions affecting their health and decisions about their work.

My biggest priority is to ensure that we increase the number of trainees in order meet their needs and to offset the shortfall caused by the impending retirement of many specialist occupational physicians. We must also ensure that we facilitate clearer and simpler pathways into the specialty for both junior doctors and existing specialists considering a change of career, so we are exploring ways in which we can encourage more general practitioners to gain qualifications in occupational medicine. I am greatly encouraged; in the last week alone, I have been approached by Orthopaedic, Anaesthetic and Surgical specialists all of whom have stumbled on our specialty and realise the potential a career in Occupational medicine can offer them.

I have been lobbying extensively not just to ensure that the various funding bodies understand the impending workforce crisis facing our specialty but also to propose solutions to that problem. Health Education England, NHS England, the Centre for Workforce Intelligence and many more play a role in allocating funding for training posts, so I have been meeting with all of them to campaign for increased numbers of training posts.

In the New Year, I will meet for the third time with Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England, to champion the role that high quality occupational health professionals can and must play not only in supporting the 1.3 million NHS employees, but also the health outcomes of their patients. I am delighted that he has specifically requested the help of the Faculty to strengthen NHS Occupational Health in his landmark five year strategy review, published in the Autumn.

The need to improve the research base for occupational medicine is acute. We must not find ourselves decrying the lack of an evidence base in years to come – now is the time to develop it. The Faculty Board has recently commissioned a Research Strategy Working Group, chaired by Dr Ira Madan and Dr Julia Smedley, to develop a national research strategy by 2016. The Academic Forum has come together again. These are two important steps forward in that journey.

SEQOHS has continued to go from strength to strength; this year SEQOHS has entered into some notable partnerships, particularly with *Constructing Better Health* (CBH) to offer accreditation to services working in the construction industry. We have also undertaken a review of the SEQOHS standards, and my thanks go to the many members who offered valuable input into the consultation. The new standards will be published early in 2015 and we want to double the number of accredited services by 2017. We are also exploring the possibility of offering SEQOHS accreditation internationally.

One significant disappointment this year was the closure of the Health & Work Development Unit. Run by Faculty Fellow Dr Sian Williams, the Unit made an excellent contribution to health at work through its guidance, clinical audit programmes and workshops. Despite the closure of the unit, the Faculty is committed to strengthening our Quality Improvement work and will be exploring avenues for new programmes next year.

Another disappointment was the progress towards a single organisation for occupational health. Nonetheless, the Faculty and Society continue to work closely on the many matters of mutual benefit.

2014 saw the launch of the new National School for Occupational Health. We are confident that the school will provide a far more comprehensive and cohesive hub for training in occupational health. Two rounds of national recruitment have already taken place and we look forward to seeing the school grow during 2015 and beyond.

None of this work would be possible with the continued support of our members, who give up countless hours of their own time to support the work of the Faculty; a large proportion of our members give back to the specialty, despite increased pressure on time and limited resources. Theirs and the extent of work of Faculty staff has only really been apparent to me since assuming office.

I would particularly like to thank Dr Raymond Johnston, who steps down as Registrar this month after four years. As well as chairing the Executive Committee eight times a year, Ray has represented the President on many occasions, including at RCP Council meetings. Always well informed and articulate, his role in promoting the Faculty has been significant.

I am delighted that the Board has appointed Dr Julia Smedley to succeed Ray and look forward to working closely with her and my other Deputy President, Dr Ian Aston throughout the rest of my Presidency.

Hopefully you will have seen the survey that was sent round recently. We want to ensure that our services and benefits reflect the needs of members, so your input is valuable. We will publish the findings of the survey in due course, as well as a report on any new or updated activities that arise from the views offered by members.

Best wishes, and if you are fortunate to have a few days off, I wish you and those who are dear to you rest and renewed energy



Richard Heron
President, Faculty of Occupational Medicine