

What goes around comes around

By Dennis Higgins, pharmacist from Surbiton, Surrey

When the committee of my local branch of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society proposed a formal dinner to celebrate the centenary of the formation of the branch I realised that as chairman I would be expected to make a speech. Not being a natural public speaker I was not exactly thrilled at the prospect but nevertheless put some thought into what I might say and how I might say it.

I am not too happy to sit while a speaker reads from a prepared script but prefer the more personal way of speaking. However, owing to lack of support the dinner had to be cancelled and I was spared the ordeal. However, let me now share my thoughts for the speech that I did not have to make.

In my last term at school before taking the Higher School Certificate I was undecided as to what I might consider as a career. My subjects were physics, chemistry and pure and applied mathematics, so a career in engineering, accountancy or analytical chemistry were suggested. It was then that a fellow sixth-former suggested pharmacy. His father had been a pharmacist and his brother was a newly qualified pharmacist and most importantly a pharmacist could expect to earn £1,000 annually in the first year after qualifying. Such a figure sounds ridiculous now when, according to the popular press, the average person would not consider getting out of bed for less than half that sum per week, but in 1950 it was four times the average wage.

I duly registered as a student with the Pharmaceutical Society only to find that my Higher School Certificates were in the wrong subjects and I needed botany and zoology in addition to physics and chemistry. I enrolled at the local technical college to spend a year studying part-time for the necessary subjects and then found it was necessary to be a full-time student to obtain deferment from National Service.

One of my fellow students at technical college was the son of a committee member and former president of the local pharmacy association, although I was not aware of this at the time. Through this contact I obtained valuable work experience with another former president of the association and, later, help to do my preregistration year. I received an excellent training in community phar-

macy, not only in all aspects of dispensing in a busy, very well equipped dispensary, which included an aseptic unit and a comprehensive reference library, but also in all aspects of management, including stock control, book keeping, buying and marketing. My teacher was also a registered ophthalmic and dispensing optician so I obtained experience in fitting and repairing spectacle frames.

After serving two years in the Royal Army Medical Corps in charge of the dispensary of a military hospital, I spent a year as manager of a small branch pharmacy near my home. I then moved away from the local branch area to manage a busy pharmacy for a small private company. Eight years later I purchased my own pharmacy, which just happened to be in the same local branch area as where I started.

Shortly after I had taken over the pharmacy I received a visit from a past president of the Pharmaceutical Society whom I had met during my preregistration year. He suggested that I come along to a branch meeting to meet my fellow pharmacists and I have been involved with the branch ever since.

I have in my possession the minutes of the local association dating back to the first meeting on 1 April 1903. The minutes make interesting reading and clearly demonstrate how history has a habit of repeating itself. For instance the members have not always been in full accord with the Council of the Society. The Department of Health has many times procrastinated on remuneration. When the Health Service started in 1948 pharmacy obtained recognition as dispenser for the majority of patients but up to one month before the start date remuneration had not been agreed.

A branch meeting in 1947 took the form of a "brains trust" where a panel of pharmacists from different branches of the profession had to answer questions from the audience. The meeting was chaired by the principal of the local school of art.

The first question was: "What reasons would you give in advising a friend to take up pharmacy as a career?" The first answer from the pharmacist forensic expert was: "Don't!"

The answer from a former president of the Pharmaceutical Society was: "It is a pleasant and interesting career with certain draw-

backs. Not the most remunerative of the professions but, on the whole, an attractive job."

The hospital pharmacist said: "It holds out opportunities to persons interested in associated sciences, such as medicine and bacteriology, to acquire contacts in these sciences, particularly in hospital pharmacy. Hospital pharmacy also provides large experience in administration."

The industrial pharmacist said: "Pharmacy as a career has many advantages, chief of which is that its devotee is not restricted to one path. Pharmacy has several branches, most attractive of which is retail. It is next to doctors, clergymen and lawyers in atmosphere of mystery. The general public rely on our integrity, which is never challenged. They know that the pharmacist is trained to be accurate and can be relied upon to know the exact time of day, when the bus leaves, etc."

The administrator pharmacist then said that the previous speaker had given all the advantages but not the advice that should be given to an aspiring pharmacist. It should be made clear that they are entering a profession, which places them under an obligation to the public at large and, in some circumstances, to the state itself.

One of the most fascinating parts of the minutes covering a century of the existence of the branch are the names of the officers and committee members. It is intriguing to see so many names from the past still appearing on the fascias of community pharmacies within our local area. Another recurring topic in the minutes is the lament at the lack of interest shown by the membership at large in attending branch meetings. How to increase attendance has been puzzling committees since the 1914-18 war.

In spite of all this negativity I believe that the branch system must persist in order to provide a forum for all members to partake of the objects for which the association was formed in 1903, viz:

- The consideration of matters of interest affecting pharmacists and members
- The promotion of friendly goodwill and co-operation among members
- The doing of such other things as may appear to be of benefit to the craft

There is little more to add.

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The **Broad spectrum** feature is open to any reader. Contributions of 1,100 to 1,200 words commenting on topical issues, should be sent to Graeme Smith (e-mail graeme.smith@pharmj.org.uk) for consideration.