

Senior Fellows Newsletter - Winter 2024

Winter came early to Edinburgh this year with snow in late November and temperatures dropping below -5° in my Edinburgh back garden. Our autumn lecture series had already started at the beginning of October when we also have our Annual General Meeting. On this occasion it was time for our hard-working chair Kirsty Muirhead to remit office. She took over the job in October 2020 in the height of COVID and had to navigate us through many of the difficulties that followed. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for her efforts and the club has emerged as strong and active as it was in the halcyon days before the dreaded virus struck.

We then welcomed our new chair Helen Zealley. For those of you who are not familiar with Helen there is an excellent interview with her on the RCPE website in which she describes her early experiences in medicine amongst many other things. View more info [here](#).

There are a series of interviews of this nature, well worth a peruse on a dark winter's evening for those interested in how medicine was taught and practiced over the mid part of the last century.

We also had changes to our committee with Roger Smith becoming our new treasurer and John Wilson an ordinary member. Our committee now has three individuals, John, Ron Fergusson and myself, who sat together as members of the MRCP Part One Examining Board some years ago. We all remember seeing questions deemed to be of a suitable difficulty yet with a clearly obvious first choice answer in the multiple choice examination papers for what were then early year SHO's. Since we are all now retired, perhaps we should reconvene to set up some suitable questions for physicians approaching retirement to assess whether they have the necessary skill mix for the job.

I wonder if questions on a healthy lifestyle, appropriate diet, managing finances, or even suitable hobbies for retired physicians might be in the exam curriculum. Perhaps we should have a competition for the most imaginative five-part multiple-choice question from the SFC. Our Continuing Professional Development consists of many interesting postprandial discussions on a wide range of topics, and, for those who had to do this when working, I am happy to say there is no need to complete feedback forms and upload reflective thoughts onto the College SFC CPD website, as it does not exist!

Mentioning healthy lifestyles brings me onto the contribution attached to this letter from Gordon Drummond who has long been the convener of the Hill Walking group now renamed the Walking Group, since it seems the majority of the walks done rarely go above 400 feet elevation. Nevertheless the group is very active and keeps up a regular program to maintain the health and well-being of our club membership. Those interested should check out the link on the SFC part of the College Website, where there are also some past walks outlined for those of independent mind, more info [here](#).

Our first lecturer this year was by Bruce Noble, a distinguished eye surgeon who in retirement has become a successful painter having several professional exhibitions. Bruce gave us a talk on the history of cataract surgery, which goes back about seven millennia. The first procedure, 'couching', is described in the New Testament as being performed by Jesus. The procedure is essentially a forceful

backward dislocation of the cataract lens into the eye. Operations on the eye itself were performed without anaesthetic or antiseptic for many centuries, with the attendant risk of panophthalmitis and blindness. The wise surgeon therefore left town before these events occurred and had a fast carriage or horse to carry him [no female surgeons in those days]. The story of the first use of artificial lenses was also fascinating, and followed an accident in which Perspex from an aeroplane window became embedded in a pilot's eye in the Second World War. Cataract surgery is now the commonest operation performed within the NHS, in part due to the ageing population, and its incredible effectiveness in the majority of patients.

Our November meeting was preceded by an interesting presentation from the President Professor Andy Elder, on the proposed new governance arrangements for the College. Andy is looking forward to having comments from Fellows on these proposals (A.Elder@rcpe.ac.uk) and I encourage any of you who haven't seen the talk to watch it on the SFC Private space on the college website [here](#).

This presentation was followed by a fascinating talk from Myrtle Peterkin on the links between Scotland and slavery. Myrtle comes originally from Guyana, and described in a very informative and thoughtful way the links between the slave trade in that part of the world and Scotland, and the interdependence of the economies that developed. She also spoke of subsequent unexpected consequences. For example, the Booker group had strong connections with Guyana and the Booker Prize for fiction was established in part due to links between one of the Bookers and Ian Fleming, author of the Bond books.

Our final talk of the year was by David Purdie on the 3 physicians who were involved in the 1745 rebellion. All were Scottish and 2 were condemned to death after the failure of the rebellion. Only one of them was executed however since the other had a friend in high places, a staunch supporter of the Hanoverian monarchy, but also who happened to play golf on Leith Links with the very same physician. They regularly won the championship and so golf took precedence to the Royal death warrant on this occasion!

The third physician, Stuart Threipland, had fled to Europe following Charles Edward Stuart. He was allowed to return to the UK following the Indemnity Act of 1747 for those like him who had never borne arms for the young pretender and promised never to do so again.

The historians amongst you will know that Threipland went on to become a distinguished College President. The medicine chest he carried with him on the '45 campaign is a precious antiquity held by the College. David's talk was as usual illustrated with the most interesting photographs and is well worth watching by anyone who is yet to see it. This and all other talks over the past years since we introduced the WebEx system are available on the private space of the Senior Fellows Club [here](#).

One other activity the Club is involved in at this time of year is the annual award of prizes to the best trial or audit (the College Journal Prize) and for the best case-report in the College Journal where the first author is a trainee doctor. The idea was developed by Stefan Slater, who has managed the process since its inception in 2011. This year he passed on the baton to Ron Fergusson who organised this year's awards on behalf of the SFC. The awards Committee is comprised of representatives from the Trainees and Members' Committee, the SFC and the Journal Editor.

This year the College Journal Prize this year was awarded to Dr Justin Geddes who did the work as an Edinburgh undergraduate. He reported a study (J R Coll Phys Edin. 2023; 53: 238–245) looking at the frequency of moral distress experienced by junior doctors in out of hours decision making in a secondary care setting using common clinical scenarios. Moral distress arises if there is discordance between the 'expected' and the 'what the junior doctor believed was the right' course of action and

in some scenarios levels of more than 70% were seen. An editorial (J R Coll Phys Edin. 2023; 53(4):237-238) commending the paper also appeared in the relevant edition of the Journal.

The Case of the Quarter Prize was awarded to Dr Charlotte Dewdney who described a previously fit young man who developed Lemierre's syndrome (internal jugular vein thrombophlebitis predominantly caused by *Fusobacterium necrophorum*) which was complicated by panhypopituitarism, ischaemic stroke and pulmonary septic embolism J R Coll Phys Edin. 2023; 53: 258-262. He made a complete recovery.

Both prize winners receive a monetary award and are invited to present their work at the annual RCPE Trainees and Members Symposium in Newcastle in January 2024.

All that now remains for me to do is to wish you all the very best for 2024 and we hope to see as many as possible in the college for our events.

Kind regards,

Nick Bateman

SFC Walking group

The Senior Fellows' Walking Group is an independent group of the Senior Fellows Club. The group welcomes any friends or relatives, (we are a very sociable group) who wish to come on these walks, which run from April to November. For more information please contact the convenor Gordon Drummond (g.b.drummond@ed.ac.uk).



A group of the SFC walking group during the 2023 walking season

In the last year we took eight walks. The places visited varied from Culross in Fife, with a contrasting range of 17th and 19th century buildings, and a remarkably long mining history, to Edin's Hall Broch (age uncertain, but old) overlooking the Whiteadder valley near Cockburnspath, and to Bar Hill fort, built by the Romans on the Antonine wall, near the Forth and Clyde canal. Most of the walks are relatively low level, and we've inspected the banks of the North Esk at Penicuik House, the Almond and the Dalmeny Estate, the Tweed at Traquair, and West Water and Lyne water in the Pentlands.

Almost always the weather was at least clement and often good, and the walks provided interesting things to see and a lot of opportunity to chat and gossip. The maximum walk length was about 8 miles. We try to include some lesser-known places: many people go away saying "I never knew about this place!" and "I must look up more about..."

I am most grateful to those who volunteer to lead walks, we depend on their enthusiasm, knowledge, and dedication to lead us each month. The picture is of Fellows at the last walk of the season outside Penicuik House. We look forward to hearing from you, and seeing you during the next walking season.

Kind regards,

Gordon Drummond