

nautical miles; not English land miles, or Scots miles, or Irish miles, but British nautical miles. How many British Admiralty nautical miles is it to Peebles from where this ship is berthed here on Boswall Road?'. The flag-lieutenant pursed his lips, closed his eyes tightly, screwed up his face and reminded me of my own problems with mental arithmetic: then he answered, '22.6 British nautical miles, sir'. 'Thank you', said the admiral, 'the MO's request to spend weekend leave in Peebles conforms to the limit of 25 miles by road or railway that is promulgated as the farthest distance permitted to officers proceeding on local leave. See that this ruling appears in Local Orders—namely, that for all purposes relevant to local leave from this ship the upper limit of distance shall be 25 Admiralty nautical miles'. 'Good show, doc!', whispered the flag-lieutenant, out of the corner of his mouth. 'I heard you, Flags', said NOi/C, and added, 'Yes, good show, gentlemen!'

#### *A reminder*

One English statute mile = 1,760 yards = 5,280 feet = 1.609 km.

One Scots mile (obsolete) = about 1,976 yards = about 5,928 feet.

One Irish mile (obsolete) = 2,240 yards = 6,720 feet.

One British nautical mile (Admiralty) = 2,027 yards = 6,081 feet.

One American nautical mile = one international nautical mile = about 2,025 yards = about 6,075 feet.

## THE LONDON COLLEGE

As I write in October, the London College is beset by holes in the ground. That on our North flank looks like a Roman amphitheatre as the lower ground floor of the College extension takes shape. Work started in July after the usual delays from unsuspected obstacles, and completion is expected by April 1996. Fellows and members have contributed £250,000 to the £1.9 million cost and about the half the remainder has already been pledged by Trusts and other donors to whom we are very grateful. The maze of trenches across the car park and into the road which gave us a passing resemblance to Vimy ridge now convey rerouted cables and drains.

Our last hole started as a fairly innocent looking rupture in the tarmac of the Inner Circle, which soon revealed a small cavity. The road was closed for an expected 5 weeks. However it turned out to be a stud abscess leading to a spectacular cavern carved out by years of leakage from a Victorian sewer. A gargantuan caisson has been lowered into the hole and the road closure has stretched out to 5 months with no end in sight. Access to the College by car is now a severe IQ test but it has brought its compensations. The freedom from traffic noise has made birdsong audible and Regent's Park seems closer than ever across an empty road. In our record breaking summer of sunshine and drought London, which relies on artesian water, has escaped hose-pipe bans and the Royal Parks have continued to blossom; the Italianate Garden opposite the College and the Rose Garden are still ablaze with colour in late October. Edinburgh Fellows seeking to escape the Northern winter have the same privileges as London Fellows in booking accommodation in 9 and 10 St Andrew's Place where they can stay, with their families, in Georgian splendour for a very modest fee.

We have just held our annual Harveian celebration. The orator was Professor John Swales. His appointment as Director of Research and Development at the Department of Health was announced the week before so he was at pains to explain that his oration had been written before he had any inkling that he would be working for 'them'. I can confirm that he submitted his manuscript six months in advance, earning a place in the Guinness Book of Records. He spoke of two revolutions in science, illustrating both from his research interest, arterial hypertension: the explosion of knowledge that started in Harvey's time with the introduction of experimental science; and the realisation that the opportunities opened up by science exceed our resources making hard choices inevitable. The text is in the November issue of the College Journal.

The Harveian dinner is always attended by the good and the great, and a few who are both. The Secretary of State for Health, the Rt Hon Stephen Dorrell, replied for the guests and gave a ringing affirmation of his commitment to an NHS free to all at the point of issue. Also at the top table was Mrs Margaret Beckett, then Shadow Secretary of State for Health, but during dinner Lord Desai surreptitiously called Westminster on his mobile and told Mrs Beckett that she had topped the poll in the shadow cabinet election and was bound for a more lofty portfolio than humble Health. The message was passed to Stephen Dorrell who paid her a courteous complement before they departed in the same taxi to vote in opposite lobbies.

The Bissett-Hawkins Medal (public health) was awarded to the CMO, Dr Kenneth Calman, the Neil Hamilton Fairley Medal (outstanding contribution to medicine) to Professor Luc Montagnier, the Baly Medal (physiology) to Professor Nick Hale, the Jean Hunter Prize (psychiatry) to Professor David Goldberg and the Graham Bull Prize (young investigator) to Professor Anthony Schapira. Honours conferred on Fellows in 1995 included an FRS to Sir Keith Peters, knighthoods to Professors Michael Peckham and David Todd and an FRSE to Professor John Reid. Sir Dennis Lasdun, architect of the College and its extension, became a Companion of Honour. The College conferred honorary Fellowship on Professor Gordon Dunstan, medical ethicist, Professor Ivan Roitt, immunologist, and Sir Richard Sykes, microbial biochemist and chief executive of Glaxo Holdings.

During a College visit to Pakistan in January meetings were held in Karachi, Peshawar, Islamabad and Lahore and the Registrar, Professor David London represented the College on a side trip to India. We welcomed representatives of the Scottish Colleges and visitors from Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Sudan to an international conference in May on the MRCP (UK) examination and with sublime disregard for geography dubbed it 'the Gulf conference'. The meeting affirmed the importance of the MRCP (UK) in the educational systems of these countries and planned closer links with the Colleges. Major topics of College Day in July were SHO training, addressed by Professor John Wass, and the interface between primary and secondary care on which the President and Professor Andy Haines gave complementary talks. Michael O'Donnell rounded off the day, as only he can, with a talk on 'The toxic effects of language' which appears in the November issue of the Journal. The following day College Presidents and overseas delegates from 19 nations discussed the impact of health service reforms around the world on standards of care and the role of the Colleges.

1995 was 'CME year' for all the Colleges. Our 20-odd conferences and courses included the long established mainstays of CME—Advanced Medicine and Science and Medicine—and a new series of CME days organised by Dr Peter Toghill, on Infections, Haematology and Respiratory Medicine. The CME registration scheme has got off to a smooth start with only one active physician declining to take part. The College also promotes CME through its Journal and publications which in 1995 included the 6th volume of Horizons in Medicine and reports or books on renal failure, incontinence, radio-iodine therapy, wheelchairs, psychiatric treatment for medical patients, the effects of alcohol on the young and on the heart, travel related diseases and the health hazards of health care professionals. On the political front, International Comparisons in Health Care and Setting Priorities in the NHS have fuelled the debate on 'rationing' in the NHS addressed by our Harveian Orator and likely to hog the headlines for the foreseeable future.

DAVID N. S. KERR

## MISCELLANEA MEDICA

### NUTRITIONAL FOUNDATION OF INDIA (NFI)

The first national nutrition foundation was set up, in the USA in 1943, soon followed by Sweden and the United Kingdom and in 1980 by India. The aim of the foundations is to provide reliable information on nutrition to government servants, the food industry, educational establishments, the media and the general public. They are independent bodies depending for their funds on subscriptions; the nature of these varies from Foundation to Foundation but includes food manufacturers, government and some private individuals.

The NFI was founded in 1980 by Dr C. Gopalan FRS, a Fellow of the College, after his retirement from the post of Director General of the Indian Medical Research Council, with an office in New Delhi. It has now moved to a purpose-built home with seminar rooms, a library, a museum and other extended facilities. This was formally opened by the Vice President of India on May 6 1995 and to mark the occasion a book, *Nutrition Foundation of India 1980-1995*, has been published summarising past achievements and aims for the future (this runs to 120 pages and is obtainable from NFI, C-13 Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi 110 016). At the headquarters there is a staff of eight under the direction of Dr Gopalan with four consultants available. As the educational programmes and the research that supports them are dispersed throughout India, there are eight regional directors. The book summarises the achievements of the last 15 years and the problems that lie in the future.

Whereas 50 years ago before India became independent it was a food importing country, food production has so increased as a result of the application of new methods of agriculture that the country is self supporting and indeed an exporter of food. No statistics are needed to show the great improvement since independence in the nutritional state and health of the people; this is obvious to a traveller on the railways which are as crowded as ever (*Proc* 1989, **19**: 345-350). But the old problems are still there. Poverty prevents millions of families from being able to buy sufficient food to allow their children to grow to their full potential certainly of the body and possibly of the mind. Although blindness due to keratomalacia is now rarely seen, vitamin A deficiency is common and a cause of retarded growth and reduced immunity to infections in childhood; yet there are ample sources of the vitamin available throughout the country. Iron deficiency anaemia is widespread especially in adolescent girls leading to later troubles in pregnancy, to poor lactation and to ineffective maternal care. Those are the three biggest problems which remain before nutrition workers in India. Today with economic development there may well be as many families in India as in UK living in 'affluence' and, as we well know, this also has its nutritional problems.

How does the NFI tackle these? There are many groups (65 are listed) in India studying the effects of supplements of food or nutrients to vulnerable groups and to the detection of these vulnerable groups, to health education and to analyses of foods both natural and artificially manufactured, each carrying potential risks of toxicity. NFI can provide technical and administrative advice to