

## Innovation and involvement

### Profile of Dr John Mucklow

Many thanks are due to Dr John Mucklow, as he demits from his post as Associate Medical Director for Written Examinations. He has been an innovator and tireless advocate for the examinations since he first joined MRCP(UK) in 1999. His dedication and hard work has been recognised in the award of the President's medal from the Royal College of Physicians of London that will be presented at the Harveian Oration on 15 October 2015.

Royal College of Physicians of London President, Professor Jane Dacre, worked alongside Dr Mucklow on the examinations for many years. 'Dr Mucklow has provided an extraordinary contribution to UK medicine, in particular via his support of the MRCP(UK) examinations,' she said. 'He has an exceptional talent in writing and editing questions, and in setting clearly written and high-quality examination papers. His strategic thinking has shaped several innovations to the examinations over many years. He has been a wonderful colleague, and loyal friend to the Royal College of Physicians of London.'

Dr Andrew Elder, MRCP(UK) Medical Director, said: 'John has been a source of sound advice to myself and previous medical directors, has worked tirelessly in support of the examinations and should be given great credit for all his contributions, particularly the successful establishment of the Specialty Certificate Examinations. We shall miss his input immensely.'

Dr Mucklow's clinical specialty is clinical pharmacology and therapeutics, and in addition to his work for MRCP(UK), he has been a prolific educator, adviser and author in his field.

He first started work on the examinations as a question writer for the MRCP(UK) Diploma examinations, at a time of profound change. The written examinations were moving from a short answer to a single best-of-five answer format. The Specialty Question Groups (SQGs) were also being established. Soon, he was invited to join the Part 2 Written Examining Board. 'That came out of the blue', Dr Mucklow remembers, 'It was a great thrill.'

In 2004, he found himself chairing the SQGs and soon made changes that would set the theme for his next decade at MRCP(UK). One of his first decisions was to throw membership of the SQGs wide open to all qualified physicians who expressed an interest. It was an inspired move, which came just as there was a serious need for a much larger bank of high-quality examination questions. Enthusiastic volunteers came flooding in, and today there are hundreds of physicians who enjoy the intellectual challenge and camaraderie of the lively SQG meetings.

Dr Mucklow also ensured that all question writers would have training, an instruction manual and regular feedback and advice. He assisted with the personal development of professional editors, appointed to introduce greater consistency to the examinations' style and format.

His next opportunity was the chance to supervise the introduction of the Specialty Certificate Examinations (SCEs), which had been run as a successful pilot in 2006 by the Royal College of Physicians of London. At the time, he was looking for a new challenge and he certainly found it. 'The post could not have come up at a better time,' he says, 'the last eight years have been the most fruitful of my life, with an opportunity to apply my knowledge and experience, with no limits.'

There are now SCEs in 12 specialties, and they are the mandatory exit examination for consultants wishing to join the UK specialist register in these fields. The SCEs are also a prized international qualification sought by candidates around the world, and there are even moves towards common qualifications across Europe, with a two-year pathfinder examination in gastroenterology underway. Making sure that all examining boards adhere to the same procedures and achieve similar standards has been a challenge; this was addressed by the introduction of a best practice model, setting out every step in the development of examination papers, to be followed by all.

Now his time as Associate Medical Director has come to an end, Dr Mucklow says he is quite happy to pass the role on. 'You need a fresh pair of eyes, things don't stand still.'