Dr Gerard Patrick Crean

New President of The British Society of Gastroenterology

Dr Crean studied medicine at University College, Dublin, from where he graduated with a degree studded with multiple honours. He did his initial house jobs in Dublin, but soon moved to Scotland to work with Dr W I Card on the Gastrointestinal Unit at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh: this was the beginning of a lifelong association between them. Dr Crean then pursued his distinguished medical and research career in Edinburgh for about 20 years, with posts initially in the Health Service and later on the Medical Research Council Clinical Endocrinology Research Unit. He was visiting professor in physiology in 1972 at the University of Pennsylvania, before taking up his present appointment as consultant physician, physician-in-charge of the Gastrointestinal Centre, and director, the Diagnostic Methodology Unit, Southern General Hospital in Glasgow. He is also honorary lecturer at the Department of Medicine, University of Glasgow.

In addition to very busy and productive activities concerned with clinical work, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching on the international scene, examining and administration, Dr Crean’s research interests have been concerned with the endocrine system and the gut. His experimental work has explored regulation of the growth of gastric mucosa and he produced the first demonstration that gastrin is trophic to this tissue. He showed that the growth of the gastric mucosa was allometric with body weight and independent of age and sex; that the endocrine system exerted a permissive effect via the pituitary; and that growth of gastric mucosa was inhibited by sub-nutrition, and vagotomy.

He established three models of gastric mucosal hyperplasia by duodenal obstruction; by the administration of pentagastrin; and during pregnancy and lactation. Dr Crean has also been active in the area of the physiology of gastric secretion. More recently, his interests have shifted towards developing a diagnostic decision system in dyspepsia. In 1969 Wilfred Card and Gerry Crean founded the Diagnostic Methodology Research Unit in Glasgow, with the aim of developing a diagnostic decision system in dyspepsia. They were concerned with the value and measurement of evidence provided by symptoms and have gone on to develop an interactive computer program which interrogates patients, elicits evidence from them and calculates a likely diagnosis. This work was done together with Robin Knill-Jones, David Spiegelhalter, Roger Lucas and Ray Holden. Dr Crean became the Director of the Diagnostic Methodology Research Unit in 1974.

Dr Crean’s interests outside medicine are principally in Irish and Scottish traditional fiddle music. Six years ago, with five others, he founded the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra, of which he is the Secretary and Chief Administrator. The playing strength, all amateurs, is 125 and it presents Scottish and Irish traditional music in orchestral form. The orchestra gives five major concerts a year, in Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, and one south of the Border in the Albert Hall in London. A tune written and named – ‘Dr Gerry Crean’s Hornpipe’ – hasn’t reached the pop charts yet.

Dr Crean is a man of immense charm and wit and is greatly loved by many. His highly idiosyncratic, and often formidable (but disguised in Irish brogue), contributions to debate in scientific meetings, or in committee, command and repay close attention. He brings to the office of President a refreshing directness and a tendency to question the established dogma. We welcome him as our new President for 1985–1986.