

British Society of Gastroenterology: President 1996–7

Our new President (Elect), Hermon Dowling, was born in Northern Ireland. He was educated at Campbell College and the Queen's University of Belfast where he graduated in 1959. After junior hospital and academic posts at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast working with the late Professor Sir Graham Bull, he moved to the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith Hospital, to train in Gastroenterology with Professor Sir Christopher Booth.

It was here that he began his work on the small bowel and on intestinal adaptation. After two and a half years at the Hammersmith as a research fellow and honorary registrar-senior registrar, he went to Boston University Medical Centre as an MRC/Wellcome Travelling Fellow. He worked with two Chiefs of Gastroenterology – Franz J Ingelfinger, who was to become Editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* the following year, and Robert (Bob) M Donaldson Jr. However, his work in Boston was supervised mainly by Donald M Small who introduced him to research on bile acids, bile lipids, and gall stones.

In 1968, he was appointed to a consultant post at Hammersmith and to the Deputy Directorship of an MRC Intestinal Malabsorption Group, with Chris Booth where he resumed his studies of intestinal adaptation (which has remained a lifelong research interest) and began his work on gall stone dissolution with oral bile acids. His first paper on chenodeoxycholic acid treatment of gall stones was published with Duncan Bell in 1972 – the same year that the pioneering work on this topic was published from the Mayo Clinic.

After a total of 10 years at Hammersmith he moved to Guy's Hospital in January 1974 to establish a new department of gastroenterology. Two years later, he was appointed to the first Chair of Gastroenterology in the University of London and only the third Professorship in Gastroenterology to be created in the United Kingdom. Despite the many changes in the London medical scene, he has remained at Guy's except for a six month sabbatical at Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 1990. He worked here with an ex-patriot British scientist, Dr Kay Lund, on the molecular biology of growth factors in the gut and on growth hormone transgenic animals.

He enjoys modern languages dabbling in French, Italian, Spanish and German. Perhaps because of this, he has always been a Euro-enthusiast, keen to promote cultural and historical (although not necessarily bureau-

cratic) links between Britain and Continental Europe. Thus, for many years he played an active role in the European Society for Clinical Investigation and served on its Council – first as Secretary and then as President.

Since 1981, he has helped to coordinate an exchange scheme at SHO level between academic centres in Britain and the Continent.

Over many years, he has also been involved in the Society's activities – not only serving on Council and its many Sub-Committees but also as its first International Relations Officer and as Chairman of the Research Awards Committee. He was the Society's representative in the EUMS, the European Union of Medical Specialists, a body set up to harmonise medical training within the EC and to implement the Treaty of Rome.

In 1988, the BSG was invited to propose candidates for the posts of Secretary-General and Treasurer of ASNEMGE – the Association of National Societies of Gastroenterology within Europe and the Mediterranean area. Hermon Dowling and John Bennett (President of the Society in 1991–2) were duly

proposed and during the International Congress of Gastroenterology (Roma 88), they were elected to these respective posts. Together with Professor Aldo Torsoli (the then President of ASNEMGE), they played an important part in setting up the United European Gastroenterology Federation (UEGF) – a Federation of seven existing societies/associations responsible for different aspects of European gastroenterology.

The principal function of the UEGF is to organise an annual scientific meeting – the UEGW – which has already become established as a highly successful venture. The 1997 UEGW, will be held in Birmingham during his presidential year. This will be the first major International Gastroenterology meeting hosted by Britain since the International Congress of Gastroenterology held in London in 1956. The BSG will also celebrate its Diamond Jubilee Year in 1997 with a special Spring meeting in Brighton. This, coupled with the European meeting in October that year, represents an exciting challenge for the Society and its incoming President.

Our new President has many interests outside medicine. He and his wife enjoy the theatre, art, travel, skiing and gardening – both at their home in London and at their country hideaway in Wiltshire. There he goes hill walking in winter and, when time permits, fly fishing for trout during the summer.

