Medical genetics around the world

Medical genetics, both as a scientific discipline and a clinical speciality, has from its inception always had the closest international links between workers. Close collaboration, whether between scientists in a research project or between centres with special diagnostic facilities, is one of its hallmarks and greatest strengths and shows every sign of increasing.

Yet it is easy to take these close links for granted, especially when one is working in a country where the subject is relatively well developed. In fact, the state of medical genetics is critically dependent on the surroundings in which it is placed, reflecting not just the economic and medical development of a country, but its social attitudes and the organisation of medical services. These factors may either promote or retard the development of medical genetics, but will certainly shape its character, as will the background and skills of those people, usually few in number, who are responsible for its early development.

This issue of *Journal of Medical Genetics* sees the first of a series of articles describing the state of medical genetics in a particular country, and it is hoped that this series will help to strengthen further the international links in this field. Planning this series is not without hazard, since an account written by one person cannot be fully representative, yet the alternative of a paper 'written by committee' would be likely to be turgid and uninteresting to readers. Editorial improvements have deliberately been minimised. These are in no sense official accounts, but it is hoped that they will give an idea of how medical genetics has developed in a particular country, of future directions, and of where particular difficulties lie. These difficulties are perhaps the most valuable aspect for readers since, by their recognition, workers elsewhere may be able to avoid or reduce such problems.

Hungary is the subject of the first of these reviews, and the clear account by Dr Czeizel covers a number of aspects which will be of interest and perhaps unfamiliar to readers. Other countries will follow at intervals, so in due course readers should have a picture of how our speciality is faring, not just in their own country, but on a world wide basis, and feel even more part of an international community of medical geneticists.

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