

Why do we sell ourselves short in GP-land?

John Ball



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I have been very humbled to be asked to contribute

a few words in this publication as a “newer/establishing” member of the college. I am grasping at the Peter Pan phenomenon of being involved with the Network of Establishing GPs, which allows you always have a “young” perspective, no matter how old you are getting. I also feel very journalistically liberated to be able to write something that is not returned by Dermot Folan with red marks all over it and “suggested” changes all over the place, as was the case several times in our reign with the NEGs publications! Thank you Dermot, have today off.

I remember doing a presentation in Galway and admitting that when I sat the MICGP I hadn't really even asked myself what that meant. I thought it was merely the title of the qualification we were doing. I hadn't questioned what or with whom I was becoming a member. In the intervening years I have come to look at my membership as I would being a member of any “club” in that you only get out what you put in, as the old phrase goes. This has been from initially getting advice within the college at the early stages of my working career to then working with some lovely and dedicated personnel at Lincoln place.

I was forced to contemplate the “value for money” aspect of being a member of the college at the AGM two years ago. It was here that I reflected on what the ICGP can do for me (one of its members at the start of his GP career and having decided to set up a practice). I presented the pros and cons from my personal perspective on the value of membership.

On the positive I was surprised to discover that a lot of information and previous individuals' endeavours are available to help us on the website (www.icgp.ie). For someone who had done a three-year training scheme, with no real management or business preparation taught, there was a lot of new readily available nuggets there from which to learn. I

also found the pricing of the ICGP compared quite favourably with equivalent membership of other professional bodies such as law and accountancy. There was also a great willingness to embrace and encourage the new ideas and efforts of any younger GPs who had an interest in getting involved in college structures.

On the negative side of things, why was I surprised to discover that there was all this information available on the website for example? If I had spent the time and effort resourcing this I would have been shouting it from the roof tops. This made me reflect on something that I feel is more and more relevant as time goes on. Why do we seem to sell ourselves short in GP land?

Having led the way with introducing quality structured training and with a substantial amount of exceptional doctors unable to get onto a training scheme because of the competition, do we still have a hangover from the old term of “failed specialists”? We should be proud of our training, proud of the ability to deal with such a varied bunch of interests within our specialty and our college should be promoting all the resources that are there for its members and not just the expensive courses (another day’s discussion!)

Or have we become too academic? Maybe there are so many of us producing documents and arranging policies that the main drive in getting messages across to people (both members and patients) has dwindled slightly ie. personality/communication/enthusiasm.

I always admire institutions who reflect on themselves regularly with the aim of improving themselves. So when we look at the past 25 years and all that has been achieved, is it now still time to go back and ask what makes a good GP? (I

shudder to think about having to answer this in an interview again!) Who should answer this for us? Is it the internet or an academic body. Is it even ourselves? With all the advancements we have made, we still have not managed to eliminate that nuisance of judgement, that barometer in front of us: THE PATIENT! I think today’s patient expects knowledge and standards from their doctors but it is not that alone that will attach them for life with their GP.

Looking at the next 25 years we need to maybe embrace all the new knowledge we are getting exposed to but also promote ourselves. Yes that’s right – let people know the balance of qualities that is working every day in Ireland and in the ICGP. We need to have the good communicators communicate on issues, both to GPs and the public and with people working on the academic side.

I suppose if I am trying to summarise my personal perspective it is that the ICGP was founded by and propagated by some multiskilled and dedicated individuals who I think we may never see the likes of again. In order to stand on their broad shoulders it may require an even stronger team approach to ensure that the “face of general practice” is not lost and that we delegate and combine to make general practice enjoyable because we are privileged to be in a career that can boast that oxymoron; an enjoyable job.

The ICGP has certainly provided excellent guidance for me over the past few years. There is a lot of expertise within the college which has been very helpful. It is amazing to think that the structures are only 25 years in place. Having just experienced what is involved in setting up a practice, the mind boggles as to how the college has come so far in this period of time. Pressure is on for the next 25!

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