

# Computer Lessons from Scotland

By Dr Lee Kheng Hock, Honorary Secretary, College of Family Physicians Singapore



*Professor Lewis Ritchie has been the James Mackenzie Professor and Head of the Department of General Practice at the University of Aberdeen since 1992. He is also Senior Partner in a group practice of 11 general practitioners in Peterhead. Professor Ritchie was in Singapore in October, as one of the external examiners for the Masters of Medicine Examinations. He is a champion of medical informatics in Scotland and we took the opportunity to speak to him and find out about the use of information technology in primary care. Professor Ritchie is a member of a number of national advisory committees in the United Kingdom. He chairs the Electronic Clinical Communications Implementation Programme (ECCI). He is also the chairman of the Biomedical & Therapeutics Research Committee of the Scottish Executive Health Department.*

The movement to adopt a common data base for family medicine in Scotland started in 1984 when the General Practice Administration System for Scotland (GPASS) was established. It adopted the use of a software that was created by Dr David Ferguson, a general practitioner in Glasgow. It was originally developed to assist doctors in managing repeat prescriptions.

It was continuously developed within the National Health Service in Scotland. Software enhancement and training support was provided free of charge. This strategy had resulted in widespread adoption and use of the software. Presently more than 82% of general practices in Scotland are using the system. The GPASS has become the backbone of the NHS IT strategy in Scotland. New enhancements that are linked to the GPASS will carry IT development into other areas of medicine. The high adoption rate

also means that there is a wealth of important data on prescription and morbidity, invaluable in the planning of health policies and optimising the use of resources. GPASS is also used to promote national standards such as Read Codes and the PCIU Drug Dictionary and facilitates the collection and analysis of national data by Electronic Questionnaire.

The GPASS is now entering a new phase of enhancement. More capabilities are planned including linking up with laboratories and the hospitals. A GPASS review committee had been formed to determine future strategy and developments and this is chaired by Prof Ritchie. The review committee was tasked to identify enhancements such as electronic medical records and use of the system in quality assurance.

There is much that Singapore can learn from our Scottish colleagues.

As pointed out by the Minister of Health, the medical profession had been slow to exploit the use of information technology. Considering that Singapore boast being one of the most wired country in the world, this is one area that we must improve upon. Competition and fragmentation of the profession is perhaps to be blamed for this. Waiting for market forces to make things happen, de novo, is not possible.

Taking the Scottish experience into account, a good strategy would be to lay the foundations both in terms of infrastructure and standards. Free market would then take it to the next level. The task gets harder by the day as individual providers dig in and becomes entrenched in the myriad of legacy systems. The way forward may be for the government to develop and provide a free, open source system and allow developers to build enhancements.

## Announcements

### Welcome to New Members



The college would like to extend a warm welcome to the following members who joined us between Aug & Nov 2003:

#### Ordinary Members

Dr Han Whie Kwang  
Dr Lim Wah Yonn Paul  
Dr Tan Aik Lim Calvin  
Dr Tan Ee Ju  
Dr Tan Kim Kiat  
Dr Tan Teing Ping  
Dr Wong Ern Mei Celina  
Dr Yam Pei Fang

Dr Yeo Kim Hai  
Dr Yeo Siew Lin Jennifer  
Dr Lim U-Lin Qeenie  
Dr Lim Yok Mei  
Dr Ng Sok Boey  
Dr Tan Lay Wee  
Dr Ang Sing Jim Roy  
Dr Koh Liang Mui

Dr Ong Lue Eng  
Dr Chin Yong Seng  
Dr Cheah Soon Min Benjamin  
Dr Chew Sze Mun  
Dr Hwang Siew Wai  
Dr Tan Kok Heng Adrian  
Dr Tong Jia Jong Stephen  
Dr Wong Mee Soong

#### Associate Members

Dr Koh Wee Boon Kelvin  
Dr Sng Gek Khim Judy  
Dr Khera Paramjeet  
Dr Ikehara Yasuiko