



Colourful mosaic

A Century of Care - A history of the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland. Edited by N.Muir and D.Bell. Published by the MDDUS at Mackintosh House, 120 Blythswood Street, Glasgow, G42 4EA, Scotland, 2002. ISBN 0-9542251-0-4.

Maybe you can't tell a book by its cover, but in this case the superbly designed cover jacket, based on a painting of staff in an operating theatre by Dame Barbara Hepworth, does give a true indication of the quality of the contents. The centenary of the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland in May 2002 was marked in a variety of ways, but none was more fitting or more enduring than the production of this history. The brain-child of Dr Ian Simpson, the Union's Chief Executive and Secretary, the book is aptly described as "a colourful mosaic" by Norman Muir who co-edited it with Dr Douglas Bell.

It "is the story of the MDDUS, the events and individuals that shaped it, the needs which it met and the contrasts between its founding and its present position in the medical, dental and legal world." From its foundation the Union, one of three mutual medico-legal indemnity organisations in the UK, has had a strong dental membership, and this is reflected in the generous proportion of the text dealing with dental matters. It is also a tribute to the excellence of the input from Drs Henry Noble and Rufus Ross, and Professor Sir David Mason, all of the Glasgow University Dental History Research Group, who take their place among a very large group of expert and distinguished contributors and essayists.

The book is a chronological anthology in which the main themes of the development of medical and dental science and practice are set against the Union's medico-legal experience. This in itself mirrors the changes in society's attitudes in general and particularly within the clinician-patient relationship. The founding fathers of the Union would have been amazed to have today's advanced procedures and effective treatments available to them - but would also be bemused to have to deal with a patient armed with the results of an internet search on their self-diagnosis, and to have to account for their actions to a lay manager or politician. The book is illustrated throughout not only by intriguing clinical and legal vignettes and brief biographical notes, but by an apt and elegant selection of art works ranging from a Leonardo da Vinci anatomical drawing to a NASA Hubble Telescope photograph. Not only is this book an excellent source of historical information, it is a fascinating read and a pleasure to own.

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