MRCGP[INT]: Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners [International] – A New International Framework to Accredit Locally Developed Assessments Throughout the World

BACKGROUND: The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is aware of the need for high quality postgraduate assessments to be developed at a national or regional level in different parts of the world, tailored to local epidemiology, culture, religion, practices, educational and health systems. The fundamental reason for the development of MRCGP[INT] and the creation of a new category of International Member is to support the development of general practice/family medicine worldwide and by doing so to assist in raising standards of the discipline, being of equivalent academic rigour to the MRCGP in the UK (but not conferring the right to practice in the UK). The post-nominal designation ‘MRCGP[INT]’ will be conferred in addition to the qualification awarded by the relevant national bodies. Study by, and the assessment of, Family Doctors is intended to provide a focus and impetus for them, their academic organisations and programmes.

There has been a very positive response to the development of an internationally recognised postgraduate qualification for General Practice/Family Medicine, equivalent in status to qualifications in hospital-based specialities. There are currently seven sites accredited for MRCGP[INT]: Brunei, Dubai, Egypt, Kuwait, Malta, Oman and South Asia. It is intended that some others will follow in the near future.

AIMS: MRCGP[INT] offers assessment criteria equivalent in academic rigour to the MRCGP UK, impetus and focus to the educational aspirations of individuals and organisations and supports the philosophy of life-long learning, continuing professional development and quality practice.

METHODS: The academic model and framework for the examination has been developed by identifying those aspects of good primary care that are truly international and the principles whereby they can be assessed. The criteria and a template against which assessment procedures from different health care systems might be evaluated, endorsed and accredited are identified. The examination framework considers the principles, domains of competence, academic and methodological considerations and gives examples of these.

RESULTS: MRCGP[INT] was launched in October 2001 with two pioneer countries, Oman (accredited November 2001) and Brunei (November 2003). Kuwait was accredited in April 2005, and in early 2006 Dubai became the fourth site. A regional collaboration between five countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) was accredited in April 2007. The most recent additions to the MRCGP[INT] cohort is Egypt, which received accreditation in November 2009, and Malta, accredited in August 2010.

The College has been working with a number of other organisations, for instance in Cyprus and Kosovo, requesting advisers to help develop their examinations for accreditation. The MRCGP[INT] Workbook provides a pathway to assist colleagues throughout the world in the development of their own assessment procedures to a degree where they can be recognised for accreditation as equivalent to the Royal College’s own membership examinations. It is available electronically on our website.