

book review

A century of change: a history of the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland.

**Edited by Norman Muir and Douglas Bell. MDDU, 2002.
£25 (£15 for MDDU members).**

'The Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland opened for business in May 1902'. So begins this rare and enjoyable centenary book chronicling the history of medical advances and social change, as reflected in the MDDUS' experience of helping members over the last one hundred years.

The MDDUS was established some years after the first medical defence organisation, the MDU, was founded in 1885 against a background of accusations against medical practitioners 'of such offences as lack of due care and attention, gross negligence and unethical behaviour'. Interestingly, the first evidence of concern about legal pressure on the medical profession in Scotland appeared in 1895 when the Scottish Medical Defence Association Ltd was formed in Edinburgh. It ceased to exist in 1899 and there is no record of its activities. It was followed by the MDDUS, formed by nine doctors and one dentist, all of whom practised in Glasgow.

The first few chapters set the scene for the MDDUS' early days, describing the fearsome medical and social conditions that existed before the onset of organised social welfare, public health measures and provision of state health care.

The book explores the development of medical and dental care in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. The MDDUS' involvement in these changes, is of considerable historical interest. Early cases described include that of a doctor called upon to attend the confinement of a young woman who gave birth seven months after marriage. He was asked by the local Kirk Session to provide a certificate stating whether the child had been conceived in wedlock. He declined to be a party to this and was supported by the MDDUS Council.

As the book relates the history of medical advances, the contribution of many distinguished Scottish graduates, whose influence has been felt all over the world, is engagingly illustrated with case studies, period photographs and paintings. It records the heroism and ingenuity of MDDUS members through times of crisis and conflict, including two World Wars, brought to life by anecdotes and archive contributions. There is an account from MDDUS archives of Dr Osborne Mavor, consulting physician, who sent coded letters home from the battlefields in Northern France and treated the wounded after chlorine gas attacks at Ypres.

The post-war rise of the NHS is charted, along with society's changing expectations of medical and dental practitioners, and the surge in legislation in the field of medical law which began in the 1960s and has accelerated in every following decade, along with changes affecting professional accountability and regulation. But this is no dry medico-legal tome. All these changes are set in the

context of clinical practice and the book concentrates on the story of medicine and dentistry in the past, present and future. There are particularly interesting chapters on newer specialties, such as medical genetics and sports and exercise medicine, illustrated with case histories and medico-legal advice. The book is brought together by a section summarising the work of medical defence organisations, with a thoughtful final section on future perspectives, anticipating change in the current format of medical litigation.

While there are many academic texts dealing with the complexities of the law and medicine, this book places medico-legal issues of the last one hundred years where they truly belong, right in the heart of the history of medicine and social change as exemplified by the realities of clinical practice. I enjoyed reading it.

CHRISTINE TOMKINS
Medical Defence Union
London