DISPATCH

From the German Federal Republic

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During 1989 there were about 30 major rheumatology meetings in the GFR, some of which were shared by Swiss and Austrian rheumatologists. Topics covered the field of aetiopathogenesis, diagnosis, and treatment of inflammatory, degenerative, and metabolic conditions. As German rheumatology during the past decades has evolved from the 'cure clinics', formerly mainly concerned with balneology, it is not surprising that most meetings took place outside university centres.

Only a few university chairs for rheumatology are available. There is still prejudice against clinical rheumatology. Professor Dr W L Gross, the new head of the medical rheumatology unit of the rheumatology clinic at Bad Bramstedt, was appointed to the newly created chair for rheumatology at the University of Lübeck. With this appointment he also becomes head of the clinical rheumatology department of the university hospital.

There is a new trend towards making rheumatology a separate discipline. So far, rheumatology in the GFR is divided into two parts. Certified internists and orthopaedic surgeons acquire the additional certification for rheumatology each in his own specialty—general medical rheumatology

and orthopaedic surgical rheumatology. Two years are required, and internists and orthopaedic surgeons take the same board examination in rheumatology. This new trend will move rheumatological education for doctors away from the hospitals and centres of rheumatology towards the universities.

Towards the end of 1988, at the German congress of rheumatology held every second year, Professor Dr Henning Zeidler, head of the department of rheumatology at the University of Hannover, was elected president of the German Society of Rheumatology for the next two years. He will have to steer the rheumatology boat through the next few years with diplomacy and prudence.

At a symposium in Bensheim to honour Professor Dr Fritz Schilling on his 70th birthday the health care structure for patients with rheumatic diseases in the Federal Republic was vividly discussed. Fritz Schilling, a man of repute in German rheumatology, proposed the creation of regional centres for the treatment of rheumatic ailments to overcome the shortage of rheumatologists in private practice, polyclinics, and hospitals with rheumatological wards in the GFR. These centres for the treatment of rheumatic diseases should provide at least 60 beds per one million inhabitants. In addition to general medical and orthopaedic rheumatology wards, these centres should also have polyclinics, perhaps 'day clinics', units for inpatient and outpatient physiotherapy, psychology, and social work, and provide the possibility for interdisciplinary consultations. It is proposed that these centres should cover an area within a radius of 50 km. Some centres fulfilling these requirements are already in existence.

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