

## WHO IS A CARDIOLOGIST ?

*Much has changed since the days of Philosopher-Physicians when one individual's learning could encompass the entire state of higher knowledge as existed then. Not only are philosophy and medicine separate subjects but each of the many branches of medical science has evolved a galaxy of knowledge all its own. Cardiovascular medicine which is a sub-speciality of the speciality of Medicine is a prime example of this knowledge explosion. Even in this sub-speciality divisions have appeared and a clinical cardiologist may not comprehend an electrophysiologist's work. When such specialization occurs it becomes incumbent upon the bodies regulating medical training to set minimum acceptable standards of training and/or competence before a person can claim to be a specialist. This is mandatory to protect the public's interest and is an established mode in the advanced countries.*

*How does one go about defining who a cardiologist is? Simply put, he is a physician who by virtue of training, research and experience in the diagnosis and care of cardiovascular diseases considers himself an expert and is accepted by his peers as an expert. This peer review which was voluntary in the past has taken a formal shape in the United States since a few decades and is beginning to take a formal shape presently in the United Kingdom. We in Pakistan are still lagging far behind in regulating claims of specialization. While a licensed physician can see and treat a patient with any kind of disease he cannot claim to be an expert in one particular field until he can satisfy his reputable peers that indeed such a claim is justified. WHILE THE SPECIALITY OF CARDIOLOGY DID START WITH THE INVENTION OF THE ECG MACHINE, NOT EVERYONE WHO POSSESSES AN ECG MACHINE IS A HEART SPECIALIST. It is not uncommon locally to see general physicians and internists who do not possess the requisite qualifications calling themselves Heart Specialist.*

*It is reasonable to expect that the Pakistan Cardiac Society should take it upon itself to define who a Cardiologist is and the minimum qualifications needed to allow a*

physician to claim himself a specialist. A few suggestions along this line would be as follows:—

- (a) Physicians who have been trained abroad e.g., in U.S.A. to have completed their formal training in an accredited Cardiology program and to be 'eligible' for the American Board of Cardiovascular Diseases and preferably Board certified.
- (b) Physicians recently trained in U.K. to have completed a structured training program in Cardiology after their MRCP.
- (c) Physicians trained in Pakistan to have completed recognized training program in Cardiology and passed the necessary examination whenever such becomes available in Pakistan.
- (d) Physicians trained before the era of formal structured training in Cardiology should either be physicians of standing and teachers with a specialist degree in Medicine and recognized by their peers or the reviewing body as cardiologists or physicians who are certified specialists in medicine and who can substantiate their claim that for atleast 5 years 50% or more of their practice has consisted of cardiac patients.

While there are obvious problems one can foresee in obtaining a concensus on such a delicate issue and in enforcing it once a concensus is reached, efforts towards these goals should be started. It is to be preferred that such regulation should be by the physicians themselves and not superimposed by the government. Pakistan Cardiac Society or a specially constituted Board could easily set the standards and recommendations for enforcing such standards.

Editor.