

# The BMA: Speaking for you and the profession

Doctors who have not joined the BMA might do worse than to consider why over two thirds of their colleagues have. The BMA has supported doctors for more than 150 years and has helped the profession to evolve. But it is the association's activities and services rather than its history and experience that are the reasons for doctors joining.

The BMA is the only organisation that represents all doctors to the review body. The BMA takes a firm democratic stance for its members on all medical issues of concern. This year the association has spoken out on Warnock, Gillick and the limited list. It campaigns effectively through its press department and reaches out into the parliament with its parliamentary unit. The BMA is the voice of the profession: its members recognise this and add their weight to it.

But there are more pragmatic reasons for joining. Most doctors at some stage have problems over their terms and conditions of service and members can turn for expert help to their regional industrial relations officer. Associate members, too, are entitled to their

Jonathan Cowie, promotions officer of the BMA's membership and regional services department, sums up the benefits of membership.

help, and in the past they have been helped over difficulties in receiving their grant. The industrial relations officers also help newly qualified doctors with their first contract.

Regional officers can often help organise events for medical school societies, by providing a guest speaker or putting on a debate. They can give talks on future careers, from getting the first jobs to preparing a CV and interview technique. The regional offices run careers fairs, and have also been known to sponsor the occasional rag event.

Another incentive to join comes from the financial savings that can

be obtained through the various BMA consumer services. The *BMA Travel Club* offers discounts on many holidays and tours, and BMA Services gives special deals on a wide range of goods and services, from dissection kits to motorcycle and car insurance.

Medical students often join in order to keep in touch with current medical issues and events. Associate members receive a copy of *News Review* each month and those in their clinical years receive a special edition of the *British Medical Journal*.



When Dr Charles Hastings and 50 colleagues met in 1832 to propose an association "both friendly and scientific," they would have found it hard to believe that it would become more than 80,000 strong.

And it is still growing, with 3,000 more practising members this year compared with last.

Britain's health care system is the envy of the world. It would not be unfair to say that the association and its members help to keep it so. Charles Hastings would have approved. ■