



The RCP's Charitable Purpose

At its meeting on 9 December 2015 the Board of Trustees approved the following as a modern statement of the RCP's charitable purpose.

Modern statement of charitable purpose

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) was established by Royal Charter in 1518. It is a Registered Charity, and the Trustees are mindful of their duty to ensure that the charity's purpose accords with the objects set out in its governing document (the Charter). However, much has changed and developed over 500 years so as we approach that anniversary the Trustees wish to make a modern statement of our charitable purpose.

Our basis is the Charter, but this was a document of its time, the Renaissance. Some of its content is formulaic and includes clauses which were standard for documents of the time. It was not written with the 21st Century in mind, but it does contain words which indicate and support a longer-term view without restrictions which might otherwise be implied.

Granting the Charter was a significant decision, strengthened shortly afterwards by an Act of Parliament. Uniquely for the times, through the Charter the King established the College in perpetuity as a professional rather than trade body in the name of the public benefit. He empowered it to set standards by regulating practice, to protect the public. The Charter refers to the example of well governed cities in Italy and many other nations, indicating that the King wished best practice to be applied, wherever it was found: and the College was allowed considerable self-governance. It was therefore inevitable - and perhaps anticipated - that, whilst remaining consistent with the Charter, the College's work for public benefit should grow beyond that expressly stated in the Charter.

There is a long history of the College doing this. Examples include: the opening of a dispensary within the College in 1698, where the poor were given free consultation and advice, and prescribed drugs dispensed from a special stock; initiating the conduct of the membership examination overseas during the Second World War; and the creation of the College's museum and library collections in the Sixteenth Century. So by the time the College became a Registered Charity in 1963 its work and purposes, whilst remaining charitable in terms of legal definition, had gone far beyond those described in 1518 but were accepted as appropriate and proper for a professional medical body established to set and promote standards.

Nowadays the RCP continues to focus its work to support high standards of medical training and patient care through activities within the meaning of charitable purpose as defined by the Charities Act 2011 that are carried out for the general public benefit. In particular most of our activities fall within the purposes of the advancement of health or the saving of lives; the advancement of education; and the advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science. Our work in these areas is made possible through the involvement of our fellows and members wherever they work, in the UK or overseas, and is summarised annually in our Report and Accounts.