In welcoming students who started in the Graduate Medical and Dental Programs this year, I asked for a show of hands from those who did not have a degree from the University of Sydney, imagining it might be about one third. My straw poll indicated that it was more than double that! Also, many of our academic staff and researchers from other places are unlikely to be familiar with the University and with those who preceded them in the Faculty and teaching hospitals.

As alumni and mentors, we should feel obliged to educate our students about their predecessors who inspired us and influenced our lives. Indeed, we also have an important role to play in informing the wider community in the University and beyond about what our graduates and medical educators achieved in their varied professional and personal roles after completing their degrees. This may often happen informally, or through published histories and biographies, or now on the internet.

Our medical alumni community seems likely to increase in size very soon. The University is proposing that ‘alumni’ should include not only graduates with degrees and diplomas but also current and former staff employed full time for at least three years, as well as students who have successfully completed one semester.

MEDICAL BIBLIOPHILES AND BOOKS

Many of us take great pride in our books, whether medical or otherwise. We gain immense satisfaction from collecting, looking at, handling, and reading them. Some of our alumni had renowned libraries.

Leslie Cowlishaw (1906), already a book collector and medical historian, met Sir William Osler, the famous physician and medical historian, while serving in London during the First World War. Osler dubbed him ‘the bibliophile from the bush’. Cowlishaw’s collection of classic medical and surgical books was the foundation of the Gordon Craig Library at the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in Melbourne, named after another Sydney alumnus who graduated in 1894.

Sir Edward Ford, Professor of Preventive Medicine and Director of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine (1947-1967), donated his extensive library on medical history to the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in Sydney.

Two major acquisitions by the State Library of New South Wales came from our medical alumni. The Benevolent Society Gordon Bradley Lowe collection of obstetrics and gynaecology consists of approximately 250 works on obstetrics and gynaecology, all published before 1900 with the earliest dating from the sixteenth century. Lowe graduated in 1915.

Ben Haneman (1944), a Sydney specialist physician, donated his Cervantes collection of 1,591 items to the Library in 1997. It contains works by that great Spanish writer and includes 1,100 different editions of Don Quixote and other items!

David Skeffington Johnson (1968) was an admired surgeon at Westmead Hospital. He too was a passionate bibliophile and ‘inveterate collector and hoarder’. David died in December 2008. His wife, Kristin Kerr (also 1968), has now generously donated to the Faculty several boxes of Senior Year Books that had been collected by her husband. These Year Books complement a previous donation of more than 100 books from The Classics of Medicine Library.

We would much appreciate donations of other books or journal articles on individual alumni, on our medical educators, on the role of our graduates in professional Colleges, and on our teaching and other hospitals. Such books would be a valuable resource for work on the Faculty’s Online Museum, as were books from the Classics Library in preparing a new exhibition ‘Plague: rats in the realm’ in the Anderson Stuart Building.

Finally, have you checked the Online Museum www.medfac.usyd.edu.au to see the digitised Senior Year Books (1922-1975) and other alumni news?