

## Contributors

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## RCGP Spring Meeting, Bournemouth, 23–25 April 2004

**W**ASN'T 'Sea Change 2004' organised excellently? Nourishment of all sorts was on offer — intellectual, emotional, filial and nutritional. As a GP registrar I felt that while the ghosts of GP past and present were well represented among delegates, my own ilk were positively wraith-like. Am I the only GPR countrywide to see 2 days less revision worth trading for insight into the dream I will be chasing this week? And what a dream: properly designed surgeries begetting an organisational culture that empowers our patients to create novel solutions, the rewards of which are shared through John Lewis-like partnership with everyone! (With maximum quality points scored, secondary care to toe the line and government to take the long view of healthcare of course). I now look forward to 'What is the evidence that Bromely-by-Bow can be repeated?' and 'From the above statements pick the three most likely sort the NHS.' And I will try not to be disheartened by the thought that could I only extend until 2007, I wouldn't have to sit the exam at all.

One doubt remains: a GPR knows that at the end of any clan meeting an 'action plan' is required. Now I don't remember making one, and all I ask of the assembled great and good is 'Did you?'

**Damian Smith**

**S**EA Change — a mission statement, a view of the future. An insight into the sunny optimistic GP of the future, full of purpose, direction, efficiency, effortlessly holistic and brimful of enthusiasm ... but enough about me. This was my first GP conference, a glimpse of

how the great and the good of the College approach a themed issue such as this. The key speakers were fluent and the smaller group sessions were thought-provoking and inspirational, with as many ideas and stimulation being generated by the Q&A's as by the speakers themselves. I had the opportunity to meet with many senior members of my new-found profession and to explore ideas with them (and to blag the odd beer). Overall, I came away with a renewed sense of purpose, a feeling that the future is coming, and coming soon; but more than that, that it is there for the shaping, the making, and indeed, for the taking.

It was with disappointment that I found the conspicuous absence of registrars, and younger GP's. The vibrancy they could have added may have tainted the proceedings rather differently. Noteworthy also were the many collegiate members who gave off a sense of low morale, that the world has changed around them and that the job and role of a GP has changed beyond all recognition since they started in general practice. This seems to have left them tired — physically, emotionally, and spiritually and I feel this is entirely understandable. But rather than be put off by this, I now pursue my career with new-found optimism, as their early retirement will open the opportunity for plentiful jobs for the new generation. Openings in the driving seat for the next era of general practice. This is where my cohort of trainees belong, this is the future. We are here! (P.S. 'Gis-a-job'.)

**Peter Windross**

**F**OR me, the Spring Meeting flew by in a whirl — 3 days that have been carefully planned over 3 years. As a major player in the organisational team, I was involved more in flitting around with a flash-disk than philosophising about our wonderful, varied lives as GPs. However, I feel it was a marvellous celebration of general practice and people. It has been a tremendous pleasure to work with the enthusiastic Wessex Faculty.

My greatest regret is that, in spite of numerous presentations, e-mails and letters, there were relatively few 'younger' GPs around. However, I was certainly not the only registrar and I was not the youngest GP there! That is a triumph in itself. I can only hope that those who enjoyed the Spring Meeting experience will spread the word for another year. The plans for future GP training may well enhance College membership, but I hope it will also increase enthusiasm for College activity too.

I especially enjoyed the sketch on Saturday afternoon. Given the graveyard slot, we

*Roger Neighbour, Paul Shepherd and Jo Boughton making music.*



knew it had to be 'just right'. It was wonderful to see my colleagues hamming everything up beyond rehearsal level and getting all the laughs we had forgotten since the first read-through. But keeping my 'straight' computer voice was therefore very difficult!

The sea was gloriously blue, the weather perfect and it gave an inspirational lift to our theme 'a sea change'. Over the past year the changes have been phenomenal in terms of the new contract preparations and the national perception of GPs. There is always government spin, but I think this weekend showed that we are stronger than spin. Many people felt rejuvenation after the parallel session discussions and renewed joy in their jobs. Above all, if we have achieved that for people, the meeting was a success. As for me, I have changed from trainee to 'trained', non-member to member and I now face the ultimate challenge — the rest of my career.

**Jo Boughton**

**T**HE best way to start a day at a Royal College conference is a paddle, and Bournemouth is just the place to do that. Professionalism is something we need to protect in view of all the changes going on, and the best session of the day for me was the time spent listening to the debate about what makes us professional. Change will come and go as surely as the tide on Bournemouth beach, but what makes us intrinsically professional?

The future may well be a health centre full of opportunities for holistic care, where the illness is explained to the doctor by the expert patient. Roles may be blurred and patients (sorry clients), may set up whatever group will help them the most. Then again, the future may be with nurses running clinics for all illnesses and not needing doctors at all. Or a computer in the waiting room doing the diagnosis and prescribing the treatment. We'll just need to sign (oh, and take responsibility of course).

The funniest part of the day was a sketch representing the desperate patient trying to get past the 'dragon' receptionist and triage nurse to see the doctor. A lighthearted look at the way we have so many more characters in our consulting rooms than just doctor and patient, including a computer interrupting with new e-mails and guidelines every 3 seconds, a lawyer checking the patient won't sue and NICE guiding our every manoeuvre.

So, my thoughts on the conference — full of old male GPs close to, or past retiring and a chance to rub shoulders with the great thinkers and doers of our time?

It strikes me as odd that the people whose very job description involves negotiating change in our patients, whether to get them to stop smoking or lose weight or do more exercise, are so reluctant to face change. The excitement of being a GP for me is that there is a lifetime of learning and change ahead and I for one won't grow stale with age. I felt sad that there were so few young doctors there — although with it being a gloriously sunny weekend, I would have rather been on Bournemouth beach trying to look like a lobster too. But rubbing shoulders with the 'great and the good' isn't an opportunity that comes every day.

I'm not sure how to make it more attractive to the whole College. We youngsters are 'more professional' according to Mark Coombe, as we all have MRCGP qualifications and all the letters in the alphabet after our names. But without the commitment to each other and the profession, where are we heading? How do we try and keep heading there together without coming to the meeting places and taking time to reassess? I think the Spring conference is important, and maybe not just for all the speeches from the front of the hall.

**Samantha Powell**

**A**s a new member of the RCGP, I went along to the Spring Meeting this year with a sense of expectation and in some ways excitement at the new world I had joined by passing the MRCGP exam in October 2003. The meeting was an interesting experience in more ways than one.

Overall, the event was very friendly and speakers at every opportunity mentioned encouraging 'younger doctors to become involved in the College'.

However, on Sunday morning, the attitude of the 'suited brigade' was very different: I was pushed out of the way at doors, I held a door open and received no thanks and when I attempted to engage someone in conversation was rebuffed with a 'who do you think you are?' look! The fact that this behaviour was so prevalent raises an issue: how are 'younger' members of the College supposed to get involved if the 'older' ones have no time for them?

Another surprise for me was the Formal Meeting and 'the procession of the Mace.' While I am in

favour of structure to events and meeting, I am surprised that such a young College should try to wrap itself up in such austere formality. Sunday morning left me confused about what the College is trying to achieve and if it hadn't have been for the Wessex Faculty, I would have left the meeting wondering if there was any point being in the College at all.

On the upside: the William Pickles Lecture was an inspiration. Having been a partner for only 2 years it is very easy to get bogged down and feel all you do is reactionary medicine — reacting to the problems placed in front of you. To hear how we have an important role in the progression of medical research was very encouraging and I shall be more inclined to look for opportunities to do this from now on.

**Richard Try**

**I** have been a member of the College for 15 years, but not an active one, so this was the first such College meeting I have attended. I was persuaded to go by my registrar, who was helping to organise it, but also by a programme containing lots of topics I fancied.

I found the programme well organised and very interesting, although it was a little frustrating not being able to be in more than one plenary session at a time — I had to miss one particular session I would have really liked to attend, for another. The quality of the speakers was excellent, and I have come away with lots of ideas and renewed enthusiasm.

What struck me most though was the contrast between this and many other meetings and educational events. There was something missing. This event seemed to

take place without the support of a healthy proportion of cynics and pessimists, they just weren't there. The aims of the College did seem to shine through, and the emphasis throughout was on quality, both from the speakers and the floor. And all this in a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

I shall certainly encourage future registrars to involve themselves, and I would like to attend more, although Blackpool is a long way off.

**Stuart Christie**

**Comment from  
Graham Watt:**

**'... advice I was  
given as a doctor.  
When a man comes  
in and tells you that  
he thinks he's  
Napoleon Bonaparte,  
don't get diverted  
into discussing the  
wisdom of his  
cavalry tactics at the  
battle of Austerlitz.  
Just remember:  
he's mad.'**