GREAT EXPECTATIONS
BURSARY
If you are a GP trainee and can only attend one conference in your 3 years of training then this is the one to choose. I hope, of course, that the study budget does not fade into existence and you can still go to others. Unlike any other courses or conferences, this is not based around the knowledge a GP needs to attain and it does not try and ‘bring you up to date’ with this knowledge. No, this course is totally aimed towards arming you with the information and skills you need to become a GP and to work prosperously for the foreseeable future.

If, like me, you have only worked in hospitals, which I should imagine will be most of us, then being a GP is actually a very alien concept. Although you are an NHS employee, the way in which you are employed is totally different, you actually have some power to choose. This may come as a huge shock as it did to me, I thought only patients had the right to ‘choose and book’. Indeed once you have got through those dreaded hospital jobs and hit the world of GP everything changes. Initially in your registrar year, you will still find that you are governed directly by the NHS and government with a set salary and working pattern. However, come the end of that year all things will change. This, I discovered, in an excellent session where we were told that we were actually able to negotiate our salaries (within reason) once we become fully qualified GPs. This revelation actually brought about a gasp within the room! We were also told what it means to invest in a practice and become a partner. This concept of becoming a partner had always seemed strange to me but finally the curtain of confusion has been lifted.

The conference lasted for 2 days in total. The days were arranged into lectures for everyone and parallel sessions that you could choose to attend. These included finances, what it means to become a partner, maternity rights, GPwSI, how to prevent burnout and many more useful topics. We also had a session on the dreaded subject of the MRCGP from the well-known Roger Neighbour.

I do strongly feel that this conference is a real inspiration for anyone who intends to practice as a GP. I would recommend it for people at any stage, be it just thinking about being a GP or on a VTS. The conference has something to offer for all these stages. For me, last year I was looking for inspiration, which I got, and this year, as a registrar, I was looking for some practical guidance on what it is to be a GP and I can safely say that I achieved this also.

This write up would not be complete of course, if I did not mention the social aspects of the conference. These 2 days give you the opportunity to mingle with others and chat about what they are doing. The organisers arrange an excellent evening on the Thursday night aptly called ‘the best out-of-hours session’ on Thursday night with a good meal followed by extraordinary entertainment. Resident O&G Professor James Drife combined medical jokes and anecdotes with stand-up comedy and poetry to warm us up for some exuberant dancing well into the night.

The conference itself headed off with a welcome and introduction from Andrew Thomson, BMA GPR subcommittee chairman, Hamish Meldrum, BMA GP committee chairman and RCGP council chairman Mayur Lakhani. Together they gave an excellent overview over recent and expected changes (including improvements in the sluggish uprising of the PMETB) and job prospects weaved in with medical ethics and politics.

Hamish Meldrum delivered an in-depth SWOT analysis on being a GP with advice on how to make the best of the opportunities the specialty offers (work WITH the government; listen to public and colleagues; keep to principles, NOT progress; don’t make career decisions too early; don’t be put off by disillusioned GPs; and keep positive).

Mayur Lakhani added further advice (declare an ambition for general practice and take a leadership role; aim for clinical excellence and the highest standards; and ensure continuity of care).

Each day offered two 1-hour so-called parallel sessions looking at relevant topics of the GP career.

One session by David Wrigley, a Lancashire GP partner, concentrated on ‘taking the plunge’ into partnership and outlined sources of information on local practice infrastructure, on the financial implications, the importance of the partnership agreement and the many potential stumbling stones to look out for, such as parity, and differences of PMS/GMS contracts.

Karen Skinner

GROWING INTO GENERAL PRACTICE
It’s well worth starting with a big thank you for enabling me to take part in this wonderful conference! Not only was it a very sociable event, but also highly informative and in all parts relevant to me on the verge of starting my GP registrar year this August.

The venue was excellently chosen, very centrally located in the heart of Leeds with quick access to the pulsating life of the city centre and the local shopping mile. The accommodation, catering and layout of the conference rooms were formidable throughout. I’m sure this was part of the reason everyone got along so well. This culminated in the ‘best out-of-hours session’ on Thursday night with a good meal followed by extraordinary entertainment. Resident O&G Professor James Drife combined medical jokes and anecdotes with stand-up comedy and poetry to warm us up for some exuberant dancing well into the night.

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