

Future directions of the Association of British Neurologists

As Neurologists, we face many pressures and changes in our working practices. Guidelines, recommendations, reports, new models of inpatient and outpatient care, re-appraisal and revalidation, inundate us. At the same time, the daily work remains. This is the heart of what we do and love: in our clinics, in the laboratory, and on the wards. It is easy to feel swamped by external guidelines and protocols.

Reflecting our daily lives, the Association of British Neurologists (ABN) must also juggle many activities to pro-actively influence the direction of our work. If we are passive, we have no voice in shaping our future, or the future care of our patients.

The ABN must provide and facilitate education, communication, research, and guidelines for Neurologists, both in their clinical and scientific work.

Education is central to the function of the ABN. Its focus is to organise stimulating and inspiring meetings. These gatherings bring together basic science, clinical practice and new developments with national and international speakers, scientific presentations, teaching sessions, along with platform presentations and posters from members at all stages of their careers. The structured components of meetings need to be complemented by informal discussions amongst academic and clinical neurologists at both consultant and training stages of their careers.

To further this aim, and with support of most members, the ABN is planning an exciting new development. From 2009, we will hold a single five-day meeting instead of the former bi-annual three-day meetings. We are providing a forum for greater depth of teaching and scientific sessions, along with more time for informal discussions and exchange of ideas.

The first of these new-look meetings will be in Liverpool from 22-26 June, 2009, at the Arena and Convention Centre. This Joint meeting with the Spanish Neurological Society includes scientific sessions on stroke, infectious diseases and dementia, along with teaching sessions on important clinical topics ranging from neuropathy to epilepsy.

The ABN will also continue to facilitate education through regular news in *ACNR*, and distribution of the *JNNP* quarterly supplement 'Neurology in Practice' and *Practical Neurology* to members. The Association supports neurologists with travel expenses for research projects and educational visits to economically less-developed countries. As a result, the ABN Africa Neurology Interest Group has produced a CD entitled 'Neurology Teaching Resource for African students'.

At this turbulent time, future consultants continue to have an active representation on Council, and the

Association provides administrative support to ABN Trainees. The need for ABN input into sound training programmes cannot be overestimated: this is our future. The Training and Education Committee (TEC) advises the Association on matters relating to undergraduate education, postgraduate training, continuing professional development and relevant issues in Europe. The Association is pro-active in Knowledge-based assessment, and provision of student bursaries and annual prizes.

2008 sees a face-lift for the ABN website. It will be more attractive, and easier to use. New features will include an improved online forum for members and useful information for the general public and other medical societies. The monthly electronic newsletter updates members on developments.

The Association administers and funds the British Neurological Surveillance Unit, assisting researchers investigating rare neurological conditions on a national scale. The electronic system has been upgraded in 2008, greatly enhancing its use. The Clinical Research and Academic Committee (CRAC) will now link this to their work, building on this potential for research in a number of other neurological conditions. The ABN is part of the Joint Neurosciences Council. It plays an active and important role in practice guidelines, working with the Royal College of Physicians and NICE to do so, and with the Department of Health, for example in the implementation of the National Service Framework for Long Term Conditions.

The Services and Standards Committee looks at standards of neurological care, organisation and distribution of neurological services in the United Kingdom, including manpower monitoring, standards development and advice regarding commissioning. We have great opportunities for taking a lead in acute neurological care, such as stroke. The Committee's function is also vital in protection of consultant time for professional development and research.

The ABN is an important facility for us, and a unified focus. Things are changing and we have a choice between shaping our future and our patient care, or having its shape imposed on us. Your participation is vital. The ABN is taking a pro-active role in a new format for revitalised annual meetings, an improved website and enhancement of research potential. These changes are essential to stimulating excitement about being a neurologist, in keeping abreast with the enormous changes in both the science and practice of neurology and in facilitating communication between members and our community.



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Figure: The Association's Coat of Arms, unveiled in April 2007, is a symbol of the aims and achievements of the ABN.



2009 ABN Meeting Arena and Convention Centre in Liverpool – 22-26 June

Joint with the Spanish Society of Neurology (original meeting held 1-2 June 1990, Valencia)
Details from Karen Reeves at the ABN • Karen.Reeves@theabn.org • www.theabn.org/meetings/ABN.php