

ABNT - Message from the Chair

Welcome to the first column from the ABNT – a new communicative venture in collaboration with the ACNR.

What is the ABNT?

The Association of British Neurologists Trainees (ABNT) is the trainees group of the Association of British Neurologists (ABN), and is open to all associate members of the ABN who are neurology trainees. We work using a system of regional representatives (elected locally), who act as the first point of contact for matters relating to neurology training in the UK. Policy is devised using a committee, at present with eight positions. Individuals are elected to the committee by ABNT members for a period of two years, and represent trainees interests on all the committees of the ABN, as well as within the BMA and Royal College of Physicians.

What's happening at the moment?

Modernising Medical Careers (MMC)

We can't avoid MMC I'm afraid – this continues to be an enormous problem for neurology trainees nationally. With an average competition ratio of 3:1 for ST3 jobs in the UK, higher in neurology, and run-through training honoured from 2007 in Scotland (and for some of the jobs in England), it's never seemed more difficult to break into higher specialist training.

Extensive lobbying (partly by us but mainly from the ABN President, and Geraint Rees on behalf of the BMA) has resulted in the allocation of around 15 extra ST3 positions in England, which are to be reserved for open competition, along with 2/3 of the posts available via vacated SpR numbers. We know from data that we've collected that this roughly corresponds to the number of research fellows seeking re-entry to training, so this year might be a very good year to apply for specialty training. However, with another 25-30 research fellows projected to 'mature' in 2009/10, and a need to identify consultant vacancies for all the extra training positions created, it's up to all of us to keep the pressure on for the future.

Tooke Inquiry

The final report of the Tooke Inquiry was published recently, and although it is broadly supportive of the issues that we think are important, it remains to be seen

quite how the Department of Health implements it.

Decoupling has been confirmed at ST2/ST3, in line with the views of many of the medical specialties, and the need to identify transferable competences has been reinforced, important in specialties like ours that attract trainees from a wide range of backgrounds.

The threat of the sub-consultant grade seems to have been downplayed in this final version (compared with previous drafts), but this remains a threat to the provision of neurology care in the UK.

The commission of a new body for postgraduate medical education (NHS Medical Education England) may seem like an extra layer of bureaucracy, but this is a model that has worked well in Scotland for some years, and may also help to safeguard study leave budgets, under threat and essential to our training. Additionally, for specialties that have strong national structures and a common voice (such as ours), it should provide a single portal of entry for negotiation and accountability.

Exit Exam

The Training and Education Committee (TEC) of the ABN has prepared a summative assessment in Neurology, similar to the pilot run in 2006, and is proposed to be compulsory for CCT for ST trainees. It was planned that the first sitting of this exam would be open in May 2008, although recent last-minute concerns of some of the specialist societies allied with the RCP (of which the ABN is one) may delay implementation.

Andrew Kelso is Secretary and Acting Chair of the ABNT. He is an SpR in Neurology in Edinburgh, with a special interest in epilepsy. He is also a member of the BMA Junior Doctors Conference Agenda Committee, Junior Doctors Committee and Scottish Junior Doctors Committee.

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