Correspondence

Requirements of equipments and instruments for teaching pharmacology to undergraduates

Sir,

This has reference to views expressed in an editorial by B Gitanjali and in a letter by Srivastava et al in the IJP. A similar dilemma as expressed by Srivastava et al was faced by us. In this context, I have sent a letter to the Secretary, Medical Council of India (MCI), New Delhi wherein I have given details of equipment vis-a-vis the ‘objectives’ and ‘skills’ needed to be acquired at the end of the course as per the ‘MCI regulations on graduate medical education, 1997’. Through my letter, I have tried to draw MCI’s attention to this anomaly. I am yet to receive a response to my letter which was sent to the MCI in December 2002. However, hopefully, the ball has been set rolling and if a concerted effort is made we may hope that the list may be corrected / modified.

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References

1. Gitanjali B. Cutting the foot to fit the shoe. Indian J Pharmacol 2002;34:300.

Reply

The views expressed by Chauhan are very valid. These views hold good for pre and para clinical subjects too. Though I do not want to sound pessimistic, I am not sure whether a single letter would have sufficient impact to initiate changes in the list of equipment proscribed by the MCI. Many more such letters would probably be needed before we see a visible change.

B. Gitanjali

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The editorial and its aftermath

Sir,

"Democracy is a state of mind"

– Boutros Boutros Ghali

The flutter of resentment caused by a recent editorial1 by B. Gitanjali (Section Editor) brings to focus issues of far greater concern than what the editorial actually addressed. I do not think the bitterness is related to pharmacology, not even science. The central issue here is freedom of expression and our ability to tolerate dissent.

The essence of democracy lies in the willingness to appreciate and accommodate dissent, tolerate plurality of opinion and support the freedom of expression. Unfortunately, the unanimous condemnation of the editorial by the executive committee challenges editorial privileges and the freedom of expression.

Is it not an irony of fate that this debate took place at the Constitution Club, New Delhi?

The argument that the editorial was ‘deficient in science and therefore inappropriate’ is weak and untenable. Science is not independent of the scientist and the world he/she lives in. Many reputed journals (including the most technical ones) devote a few pages to the social, cultural and political aspects of science. The most prestigious journals such as Nature and Science are read more often for these pages of general interest than for abstruse technical stuff. I am sure the circulation will improve if IJP includes more such articles.

Editorials/articles such as this could be challenged once again on the question of ‘inappropriate scientific content’. Therefore it is both urgent and important to lay down a comprehensive and explicit editorial policy. And editorial freedom, within the policy framework, should be respected.

My comments are not related to the opinions expressed by the above editorial per se. The 36th Annual Conference was certainly not deficient in scientific content. I often found it difficult to choose between two sessions, both of them equally good. The opening talk by Salvador Moncada was a treat by itself. I also appreciate the decision to schedule the inaugural session during the unobtrusive evening hours, enabling the politically disinterested delegates to have a break.

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Reference


Time for change: Preconference workshop, annual conference and IJP

Sir,

After reading a few thought-provoking articles in the Indian Journal of Pharmacology (IJP) and attending the XXXVI Annual Conference of the Indian Pharmacological Society at Delhi, I sincerely feel that the majority of the members of the
society are ready for a change. Therefore, in line with the editorial (IJP 2003;35:348) entitled “Bags, banquets and boring speeches: The bane of conferences” written by B. Gitanjali, I would like to put forth a few suggestions.

The Preconference Workshop (PCW) which is held almost every year before the annual conference has been observed to be just a series of lectures by renowned persons or those who are somehow close to the organizers of the conference. Most of those attending the PCW are postgraduate students who pay the registration fee from their own pocket in order to learn something new which they are not able to learn in their own departments. In the PCW at Delhi, some topics were repeated by all the speakers, others were not covered adequately and there was no hands-on training imparted due to lack of time. I would like to make the following suggestions for the workshops to make them more useful and to increase the number of delegates registering for the same.

1. Workshops should focus on imparting hands-on training and not have only lectures. Adequate time should be set aside for interaction between the faculty and the participants.
2. Participants should be given sufficient time to highlight their problems related to the topic and the panelists should help in solving the problem then and there or later through correspondence.
3. Workshops should be of two days duration and the registration fee should be nominal (around two hundred rupees).
4. There should be active participation of the pharmaceutical and academic institutions – a fact which was emphasized in the symposia “Academic Industry Interaction” at the recent annual conference of IPS.
5. Only a working lunch should be served as was done at Delhi this time.

The annual conferences are basically becoming meeting places for pharmacologists and it has been observed that many of the delegates are sitting outside in the sun and chatting with their friends while a few are away shopping. Only approximately 50 per cent of the delegates sincerely attend the sessions. A few of the speakers are invited to deliver more than one lecture and invariably these are repetitions of his/her earlier presentations with slight modifications. Therefore the delegates are not interested in attending those sessions. I would like to highlight a few points which I consider important.

1. A folder with a writing pad and pen along with the abstract book is sufficient as a conference kit.
2. The abstract book should be published by the editor of the IJP on behalf of the organizing committee and distributed at the conference only. They need not publish the abstracts again in the IJP.
3. Sessions should be arranged in such a way that two prize sessions or similar topics do not clash.
4. Before a letter of confirmation that a paper has been selected for presentation at an award session is sent, the organizing secretary should scrutinize the paper and make sure that it conforms to the rules and regulations governing the award. Once the letter is sent there should be no change. Informing presenters at the last moment that his/her paper cannot be included in the prize session is demoralizing.
5. The chairman, co-chairman as well as the judges for the award session should be selected only on merit and not for any other reason. The judges should have done some work in the related fields and should be able to judge the presenter without prejudice.
6. Conference organizers may sacrifice the quantity of the sessions but not the quality.
7. Young pharmacologists should be selected as speakers in the symposia. This will serve as an encouragement.
8. Timekeeping is an absolute necessity in the symposia. In almost all the symposia there is never any time left for interaction with the audience. Speakers should be strictly forewarned that they must stick to time.
9. The time for poster sessions should be fixed in such a way that it does not coincide with other sessions. In this way, the presenters can interact with more delegates and senior pharmacologists who would be able to give good suggestions regarding their work.
10. Lunch and dinner should be simple and not lavish. A working lunch should suffice and dinner too should be early so that all delegates can reach their hotels or guesthouses by 9.30 PM so that they will be fresh for the next day.
11. There is no need for a cultural program because it has been noticed that very few persons remain till the end of the cultural program if dinner/drinks are available outside the hall. I consider it a waste of money by the organizers and an insult to the performing artists.

The general body meeting (GBM) is another session which is attended by many of the delegates. During the start of the GBM the hall is jam-packed but by the end of it most of the hall is empty. My suggestions to improve the GBM are given below:

1. The Annual Report of each of the executive committee members should be placed at a few prime locations from the morning of the first day of the conference for all the members to read at their convenience or they can be distributed along with the registration badges. There is no need to distribute photocopies to members at the time of the GBM. During the meeting, the report should be discussed only briefly. There seems to be an unfortunate trend that EC members highlight only achievements and not drawbacks in their reports.
2. If delegates wish to ask questions at the GBM, they should give it in writing at the registration desk. The appropriate executive member can then answer the question at the GBM.
3. The meeting should be short so that the halls don’t get empty by the time the meeting is over and only a few members are left to welcome the New Executive while the rest are roaming outside or having dinner.
4. The discussions occasionally turn into a slanging match between various groups of pharmacologists. This should be avoided.

I also wish to highlight a few suggestions for the editorial board (EB).

1. The EB and the Advisory committee should be revised and updated once in two years and should consist of a group of
persons who have some dedication to the society and to
the journal. They should be scientists who are well recog-
nized in their field. They must be people who attend the
annual conference at least once in two years and who can
actually help to improve the journal in any way.

2. Reviewers should be selected with care and should be in-
cluded for the quality of refereeing. They should preferably
be those attending an Annual Conference of IPS once in
two or three years and presenting his or her work as au-
thor or co-author.

I am hopeful that the day is not far away when I will be
able to see a “conference with a change”. I end by saying that
the desire for change is a sign of progress and not everything
that is addressed can be changed but nothing can be changed
until it is addressed.

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More on the accuracy of references in
the IJP

Sir,

I read the comments1 on the editorial2 dealing with the
accuracy of the cited references in a research paper. It is the
authors’ responsibility and the editors’ desire to provide ac-
curate references, and the readers’ right to have them. Cor-
correct references facilitate crosschecking and validation of the
cited text and thus enable the propagation of knowledge.

Recently, a good number of thoughts have been penned in
the Indian medical literature.3-5 Here, I would like to empha-
size the use of technology to help the authors maintain their
bibliography. The use of bibliography-managing tools while
preparing manuscripts will help the authors to improve their
published work. There are a large number of commercial tools
available; here, for the benefit of the readers, I have listed
some freely available software for this purpose. I have not
tested each of them personally and hence cannot recommend
one over the other.

http://mlagen.sourceforge.net/
http://www.biblioscape.com/biblioexpress.htm
http://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/RWL/Projects/citation/
http://www.gnu.org/software/groff/groff.html
http://www.santafe.edu/~dirk/sixpack/

I, however, strongly believe that no force,6 guidelines7 or
undertaking8 alone can help in avoiding errors and inaccura-
cies of this nature; what will help and succeed is the desire of
a person to give his best to every paper bearing his name in
the byline. The fulfillment of this desire can be facilitated by
the correct knowledge of the norms of writing and it is the
editors’ responsibility to spread this knowledge.

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