



for treatment that works

Registered Charity Number: 1003392

HealthWatch Secretary:

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<p>Minute of the Sixteenth HealthWatch Annual General Meeting 19th October 2004 held at the Medical Society of London, Lettsom House, 11 Chandos Street, London W1M 0EB The meeting was Chaired by HealthWatch President Nick Ross</p>
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- 1. Forty-five Members and Visitors were present:** see Appendix 1. **Apologies for absence** were received from: Shirley Churchman, John Guillebaud, Barbara Hollingworth, Philippa Pigache and Gillian Robinson.
- 2. Minutes of the Fifteenth AGM 28th October 2003 were approved.**
- 3. There were no matters arising from these minutes.**
- 4. Chairman's Report**

John Garrow reported: I am more than ever convinced that HealthWatch can make an important contribution to health services in this country. Our aim is to provide the public with reliable information about healthcare. There is no shortage of people who want to provide information on healthcare to the public, but in many cases this is better described as advertising than education.

Peer-reviewed medical journals are at the highest academic level of information providers. These publish the results of randomised controlled trials, which are the most respected form of clinical trial to establish the efficacy of treatments. I will say no more about this now, because our Award Winner this year is Dr Richard Smith, for 25 years Editor of the British Medical Journal, and an outstanding champion of ethical medical journalism. The title of his Address implies that he has some concerns about the influence of pharmaceutical companies on the material that is published in the medical press, so we will hear a lot more from him about that later this evening.

It would be invidious to identify the lowest academic level of information providers about healthcare, but a contender for this title would be "the world's most acclaimed nutritionist". This lady provides nutritional advice to a television audience of 4 million, her book has been high on the best seller list, and her patients (we are told) are high on the celebrity list. It is now being demonstrated that her academic qualifications are very much less impressive than they seem: indeed one of the diplomas that testify to her academic prowess has recently been acquired by a dead cat ¹. However, readers or television viewers (and consequently journalists) are not fastidious about academic credentials: as Geoff Watts explains ² they want exciting stories about exceptional individual people.



HealthWatch is keen on proper testing of treatments by well-designed clinical trials, rather than exciting stories about exceptional individuals, so we cannot look to the media to publish the evidence that we consider to be important. Royalty does not always see the need for proper clinical trials before claims of efficacy are made³. Sadly, Health Which? has now ceased publication. But new structures are being created to ensure that new research projects are transparent and fraud-proof, that published research is comprehensive and unbiased, and that attention is paid to the experience of the real "expert" on a particular disorder - that is, the patient.

All this is very encouraging, but there is a trade-off between productivity in research and rules to improve safety. Even more stringent regulations about permissions and documentation for clinical trials become counter-productive: eventually they make some important types of research virtually impossible⁴. Meta-analysis of publications by experts in the field may reach more authoritative conclusions than selective reviews by proponents of one particular therapy, but the inclusion criteria for studies to be analysed are crucial, and these inclusion criteria may reflect the interests of the meta-analysts⁵. The Expert Patient Programme⁶ brings forward the experience of patients suffering from a particular disease, but generous sponsorship of patient support groups by commercial organisations that have an interest in the disease may, by this route, bypass the rules forbidding Direct to Consumer advertising⁷.

Expenditure on Healthcare is huge, and wherever huge sums of money are being spent commercial providers will quite properly seek to capture a good share of the market. Our aim to inform the public about "the treatment that works" is now less about exposing charlatan snake-oil salesmen, but more about the grey area in which commercial interests, often by subtle methods that are difficult to detect, overstate the efficacy of their product. This is a difficult and often thankless task. I would like to thank most sincerely all the Committee that do this work, but in particular our President, Nick Ross; our vice-chairman, David Bender who brilliantly manages our website and (for example) provided the audiovisual equipment for this meeting, our Secretary, Michael Allen, who has done even more than usual this year due to the illness of our Membership Secretary, and our Treasurer, John Hanford, who has for the past 8 years looked after our finances, but who is sadly resigning at the end of the current financial year. The Ajahma Charitable Trust has continued generously to support our Student Prize, which is administered by Dr Joan Gandy, and Caroline Addy seeks out potentially libellous items in our Newsletter. All of these put in many hours work for HealthWatch without any financial reward whatever. I am very proud and grateful to work with such a talented and dedicated group of people.

John Garrow, 19th October 2004

References: 1. Goldacre B. *Bad science* Guardian 30th September 2004; 2. Watts G. *Science in the news* HW Newsletter 55, p 6.; 3. Baum M. *With respect, your highness, you've got it wrong* BMJ 2004;329:118; 4. HW Newsletter 53 (whole issue); 5. Garrow J. *Meta-analysts, public money and public trust* HW Newsletter 55, p 4 and MTA website <http://www.ncchta.org/forum/index.htm>; 6. Payne M. *The expert patient will soon be here* HW Newsletter 51, p 7; 7. Allen ME. *Ask about medicines week: can you trust the answer?* HW Newsletter 55, p3.



5. Membership Secretary's Report

Shirley Churchman has been ill for most of the year and the meeting sent her its good wishes. Though unable to attend the meeting, she sent this report: Firstly let me say how sorry I am that I am unable to be with you this year, but I would like to thank the Committee for their support over the past months. At present we have 196 members; of which only 9 have not paid to renew for this year. During the year we have had 15 new members. Free copies of the newsletter are sent to another 60. Journalists that require newsletters by post have been greatly reduced; a number now receive it in PDF format by e-mail and others prefer to read it on the web.

6. HealthWatch Website

David Bender (Webmaster) was congratulated by the President for the excellent and professional redesign of the website. He reported that it had had 30,000 hits since its inception and that there were 40-50 searches conducted within the site each week, suggesting it was found of considerable interest and use.

7. Treasurer's Report

John Hanford reported that our income continues to be insufficient fully to support our main activity, the publication of the Newsletter and HealthWatch remains somewhat precariously dependent upon the occasional donation from members. The full Treasurer's Report is attached as Appendix 2.

Caroline Richmond asked if we could arrange to accept donations on-line as some other charities do. David Bender stated the difficulties of arranging a secure site were considerable, but that he could put a form on the website that could be downloaded and then returned with a cheque donation.

8. Election of Officers and Committee Members

Committee Members re-elected:

Nick Ross (President)

Michael Allen (Secretary); David Bender (Vice Chairman); Walli Bounds; Diana Brahams; Malcolm Brahams; Shirley Churchman (Membership Secretary); John Garrow (Chairman); Neville Goodman; John Hanford (Treasurer; until the end of the financial year); John Illman; Gillian Robinson; Heinz Wolff.

One vacancy on the committee remains and various members expressed an interest in being co-opted.



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Non-committee appointments re-confirmed:

Mandy Payne (editor HealthWatch Newsletter); Caroline Addy (reads Newsletter copy for libel); Joan Gandy (organiser of Student Prize competition).

9. Appointment of Auditors

Neilson & Co was re-appointed.

10. Any Other Business

Methods of widening distribution of the Newsletter, especially to General Practitioners, were discussed. It was suggested that individual members should just take an occasional copy when visiting their own GP.

Nick Ross announced the AJHAMA Student Prize winners:

First Prize: Emma Court (Barts & The London)

Runner up prizes: Christopher Coyle (UCL Royal Free); Elizabeth Fairfax* (Barts & The London); Thomas Nolan* (UCL); Vinjay Parmar* (Leicester) and Hoong Wei Gan (Nottingham) [Students marked * were present and collected their prizes in person]

Nick Ross presented the 2004 HealthWatch Award to Richard Smith.

Richard Smith addressed the meeting on:

Are medical journals simply an extension of the marketing arm of pharmaceutical companies?

This paper will be summarised in the next edition of the Newsletter.

Michael Allen (Secretary)

John Garrow (Chairman)



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Appendix 1: AGM Attendance

Name	Voting Member?
Allen, Enid	Yes
Allen, Michael	Yes
Beecham, Linda	Yes
Bender, David A	Yes
Bewley, Susan	Yes
Bickmore, Mrs MA	Yes
Bounds, Walli	Yes
Brahams, Catharine	No
Brahams, Diana & Malcolm	Yes
Brahams, Gareth	No
Brahams, Nigel	No
Chalmers, Sir Iain	Yes
Fairfax, Elizabeth	No
Ferriman, Annabel	Yes
Gandy, Joan	Yes
Garrow, John	Yes
Garrow, Katharine	Yes
Goodman, Dr Neville	Yes
Gordon-Boyd, Sally	Yes
Hamilton-Fairley, Diana	No
Hanford, John	Yes
Hanford, Rita	No
Herxheimer, Andrew	Yes
Hytton, Prof Frank and Mrs	Yes
Illman, John	Yes
Isaccson, Keith	Yes
Kavalier, Fred	No
Marks, Vincent	Yes
May, James	No
May, Peter	Yes
Mew, John	Yes
Nolan, Tom	No
Parmar, Vinay	No
Plaut, Dr G S	Yes
Richmond, Caroline	Yes
Rose, Les	No
Ross, Nick	Yes
Sachdeva, Vikram	No
Samuel, Douglas	No
Samuel, Oliver	Yes
Siddall, Valerie	No
Smith, Richard	No
Watts, Jeff	Yes
Wilcox, Dr R	Yes
Wilcox, Rebecca	No
Woolf, Heinz	Yes



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Appendix 2: TREASURER'S REPORT – twelve months ending 31st May 2004

The Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure Account for the period 1st June 2003 to 31st May 2004 are available at the AGM and/or a complete copy of the Financial Statements if required.

As in previous years the major part of our total expenditure of £7484 (£10,794), is incurred in producing and distributing the Newsletter (four each year).

During the year £2,274 (£3,405) was expended on the HealthWatch Student Prize. A further very generous donation of £4,500 was received from the Ajahma Trust to enable the HealthWatch Student Prize to continue, as noted in the Trustees Report. The accounts show the Ajahma funds separately from general HealthWatch funds.

Members of the Committee continue to give their time and effort at no cost to HealthWatch. The level of subscription income of £2,913 (£3,042) does not cover the cost of the Newsletter; therefore donations continue to be an important contribution to income. Once again generous donations of £1,798 (£2,074) have been received from members of HealthWatch and others. Recovery of tax on subscriptions and donations is a valuable addition to HealthWatch funds and a further number of members have signed Gift Aid forms this year. All members are encouraged to use this "painless" facility if they do not already do so.

The Accounts show a surplus this year of £675 (£820 loss), excluding the restricted Ajahma donation. There was a disappointing decrease in the level of subscriptions and donations this year. Expenditure on publicity last year (£1,080) was not repeated in this current year as it was not considered to be effective. Without donations, which are an uncertain source of funds, it would be necessary to more than double our membership numbers, or, double the current annual subscription in order to "break even". As stated previously, reserves are needed not only for the Newsletter but also in case of libel defence (insurance being impractical) and for future projects that the Committee would like to implement given sufficient funds.

As required by the HealthWatch Constitution, the Accounts were audited by external accountants and were examined by our honorary auditors, Dr Katharine Garrow and Dr Joan Gandy.

John Hanford,

06/10/04

[Extracts from the Certified Financial Statement follow. Full Financial Statements can be viewed by arrangement with the Treasurer]



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HEALTHWATCH

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MAY 2004

	<u>NOTE</u>	<u>2004</u>		<u>2003</u>	
		£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS	3		340		400
CURRENT ASSETS					
Prepayments		204		204	
Balance at Bank - Current Account		558		2,329	
- Deposit Account		20,686		16,058	
		-----		-----	
		21,448		18,591	
CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year					
Sundry Creditors		800		1,138	
		-----		-----	
NET CURRENT ASSETS			20,648		17,453
			-----		-----
NET ASSETS			£20,988		£17,853
			-----		-----
FUNDS					
Restricted			7,588		5,128
Unrestricted			13,400		12,725
			-----		-----
			£20,988		£17,853
			=====		=====

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 6 August 2004 and signed on their behalf by:

Prof. John Garrow Esq (Chairman)

J Hanford Esq (Hon. Treasurer)

The notes on page 6 form part of these Financial Statements.



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HEALTHWATCH
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MAY 2004

	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Restricted</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total 2003</u>
	£	£	£	£
<u>INCOMING RESOURCES</u>				
Subscriptions	2,913	-	2,913	3,042
Donations	1,798	4,500	6,298	2,074
Interest Received (Gross)	394	234	628	704
Gift Aid Tax Refund	780	-	780	989
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TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES	5,885	4,734	10,619	6,809
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<u>RESOURCES EXPENDED</u>				
Protocol Appraisal Project	-	2,274	2,274	3,405
Newspaper Costs	3,143	-	3,143	4,028
Postage	432	-	432	466
Printing & Stationery	271	-	271	286
AGM Expenses	404	-	404	559
AGM Dinner (Net)	40	-	40	104
Publicity	-	-	-	1,080
Helpline	110	-	110	120
Audit Fees	546	-	546	499
Website Expenses	204	-	204	176
Depreciation	60	-	60	71
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TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED	5,210	2,274	7,484	10,794
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NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR	675	2,460	3,135	(3,985)
Funds brought forward	12,725	5,128	17,853	21,838
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FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	£13,400	£7,588	£20,988	£17,853
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