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Robin Ince
Prof Steve Jones FRS
Dr Margaret McCartney
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Lord Dick Taverne QC

HealthWatch

for treatment that works



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Minutes of the 25th Annual General Meeting
held on October 24th 2013
at the Medical Society of London

1) Present: Mike Baum, David Bender, Kenneth Bodman, Thomas Bewley, Dame Beulah Bewley, Susan Bewley, Debra Bick, Walli Bounds, Malcolm Brahams, Diana Brahams, Kenneth Chan, Sir Iain Chalmers, Jim Edgar, Annabel Ferriman, Roger Fiskens, Jolene Slothouber Galbreath, Fiona Godlee, Neville Goodman, Sally Goodman, Alan Henness, Derek Ho, Keith Isaacson, Jenny Isaacson, Charlotte Hutchins, John Kirwan, Henry Lancashire, Richard Lansdown, Shuchang Liu, Dylan MacLoughlan, James May, Tom Moberly, Anil Patel, Mandy Payne, Richard Rawlins, Caroline Richmond, Nick Ross, Dick Taverne, Janice Taverne, Gail Tindall, Neil Weir, Peter Wilmshurst, Barbara Wisby.

2) Apologies for absence: Anne Raikes, Les Rose

3) Minutes of the 24th AGM had been posted on the web. There was one matter arising:

The Secretary reported that while the 24th AGM had given the committee permission to explore incorporation as a limited company, a new status of Charitable Incorporated Organisation was being introduced, which would give the Trustees and members appropriate protection. CIO is being introduced initially for large organisations; we will wait until organisations of the size of HealthWatch are eligible, then apply.

4) Chairman's report (Keith Isaacson)

This year started with the most exciting surprise announcement that an anonymous donor had given HW £50,000 for research projects that had aims related to HW. The requirements and legal documents have been prepared. It has been decided that it should be allocated in amounts of up to £10,000. We are keen to promote this grant and hope that this may be used to extend Les Rose's study on trading standards.

In the spring we had a public meeting which involved all three of our new patrons. Prof Steve Jones and Sir Michael Rawlins each spoke on the topic. "The Direction of Medical Research: Top Down or Bottom Up?" Sir Michael had only flown back from America that morning. The meeting was chaired by Robin Ince. Thanks to Debra Bick and her team, we were able to hold the meeting at Kings. Over 100 attended and it was an excellent evening.

The study on the teaching of Complimentary and Alternative Medicine to medical students carried out by our two student members Derek Ho and Kenneth Chan and has been accepted for publication in FACT. The follow up to this study a questionnaire was sent to all the Deans of the UK medical schools to determine if the teaching of CAM was subject to critical analysis. I was astonished to find that there are 31 schools. I personally signed and sent a letter to all 31 Deans. It was extremely disappointing that only five of them replied.

We are delighted that our former award winner Margaret Mc Cartney has accepted our invitation to become a Patron. She sends her apologies for tonight's meeting.

I appreciate the help that I get from all the members of the committee especially David Bender the secretary. One of our student members Derek Ho has qualified in medicine and we congratulate him and hope he will be able to continue as a trainee doctor committee member.

Mandy Payne our editor has returned to live in England and she is now able to attend our committee meetings at which her input is invaluable. We really appreciate the work she puts into the Newsletter and the Tweet that she now runs, fitting this into her other work commitments.

We are losing two Committee members this year, both of whom have other busy commitments Gillian Robinson and Walli Bounds. They have both put in many hours of their time to run the student prize and we hope that they may continue to do this. Walli has been on the committee since the inception of HW and we will greatly miss her research expertise.

Nick Ross our President keeps his finger on the pulse of medical matters. His media contacts are invaluable.

5) Membership report (Kenneth Bodman)

As members may know or may not know, if an article is written for the newsletter and the author is not a member of HealthWatch, they are treated as an honorary member for one year and then they are offered full membership. One author this year accepted full membership straight away; however a previous writer who wrote an article last year has so far not taken the offer up.

Two previous members to HealthWatch regrettably did not renew their membership this year and sadly HealthWatch lost a former treasurer John Hanford who passed away in March, but as I said last year that despite people cutting back on their outgoings, HealthWatch membership remains steady; as some members leave others take their place and so the current membership stands at 145 of whom 115 have signed up for gift aid and 58 members receive the email version of the newsletter, so the hard copy is still the preferred choice amongst members for the moment.

49 students currently receive the newsletter by email and applications for Student membership have been as popular as ever in the last year. However, 25 students graduated this year and were offered either membership or an extra two years student membership but only eight opted for the extra membership, with no replies to full membership, so we are still not gaining former student members as full paying members.

6) Treasurer's report: prepared by Anne Raikes and presented in her absence by David Bender

The Balance Sheet and Statement of Financial Activities for the period 1st June 2012 to 31st May 2013 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 £6,254 (£5,926) is incurred in producing and distributing the Newsletter (four each year). The increase from last year comes from the costs of the highly successful lecture evening in March this year.

Members of the Committee continue to give their time and effort at no cost to HealthWatch. The level of subscription income of £3,875 was up slightly from the previous year (£3,694) but together with Gift Aid still covers the cost and distribution of the Newsletter.

During the year £1,986 (£1,290) was expended on the HealthWatch Student Prize. This was funded out of the remaining funds supplied by the Medico Legal Society together with the generous donation from Professor John Garrow. There remains £2,876 on in this fund for the coming years. The future of the prize is further secured by Katy Christomanou (Senior Journals Editor, STEM) of Cambridge University Press who had generously agreed to sponsor the competition from 2014 on behalf of CUP.

The Accounts show a small loss this year of £308 (excluding the restricted Healthwatch Student Prize fund) compared with last year's profit of £707. Last year was boosted by donations of almost £800 and this year there was the additional, but worthy, cost of the lecture evening. There remains a need to maintain Healthwatch's level of reserves, 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.

Last, but absolutely not least, HealthWatch has received a donation of £50,000 from a private individual who supports our aims and objectives, and who has no connection with any pharmaceutical

company, or any financial interest in any complementary or other therapy or treatment, to establish a research fund.

Healthwatch reserves, excluding the Student Prize Fund and the Healthwatch Research Fund, totalled £16,501 at end May 2013, the bulk of which is held in a COIF Charities Deposit Fund.

7) Election of officers and committee members

The following nominations had been received; there being no more nominations than vacancies all were elected without a vote

Chairman: Keith Isaacson
Vice-Chairman: James May
Treasurer: Anne Raikes
Secretary: David Bender

Committee members and Trustees: Susan Bewley, Debra Bick, Diana Brahams, Malcolm Brahams, John Illman, Caroline Richmond, Les Rose

Coopted committee members who are not Trustees: Derek Ho (representing trainees doctors), Kenneth Chan (representing medical students), James Illman and Tom Moberley (representing medical journalists). Walli Bounds will attend committee meetings as appropriate in her role organising the student prize.

8) HealthWatch student prize for the critical appraisal of clinical research protocols (Walli Bounds)

The training of healthcare professionals in the principles and practice of evidence-based treatments remains an important part of medical education. Healthcare providers and the lay public continue to be inundated with publicity about new and/or allegedly more effective, or 'gentler' treatments. However, in order to decide whether diagnostic or therapeutic claims for a particular treatment are valid, medical, nursing/midwifery students, and those of allied professions, need to be able to assess the quality of the evidence presented, in order to guide their clinical decisions. The annual HealthWatch student prize competition aims to gain insight into how well our students are equipped for this task. In previous years, financial support for the competition was provided by the AJAHMA Trust and the Medico-Legal Society, for which we are most grateful, but this funding has now been exhausted. However, thanks to the generosity of Professor John Garrow (former Chairman of HealthWatch) we were able to continue with this important work for the thirteenth year, and this report describes our 2013 competition.

Aim:

The project aims to determine whether medical, nursing/midwifery students and those of allied professions have acquired the skills needed to critically appraise clinical trial protocols and hence assess the validity of research findings. Often claims for effectiveness or safety of healthcare treatments published in the medical/lay press and on the internet are, on closer examination, based on poorly designed clinical trials that could not possibly support the stated claims. It is therefore vitally important that our future healthcare professionals develop the skills to properly assess the quality of clinical trials, and the confidence to speak out against 'bad science'.

Method:

Students are invited to appraise four 1-page long hypothetical research protocols and to rank them on a scale of 1 – 4 (1 = best, 4 = worst) according to which one is most likely to provide a reliable answer to the stated aim of the trial. The protocols are designed so as to contain varying degrees of scientific, methodological and ethical flaws (e.g. no control group, or no informed consent), which the students are expected to identify and comment upon. They are required (in no more than 600 words) to explain their reasons for assigning their ratings and suggest ways in which the protocols could be improved. Their replies are then assessed against the pre-assigned ranking from the judges.

Protocols in the 2013 competition included:

Support Tights for Varicose Veins
Cocoa Butter lotion for the prevention of striae gravidarum in pregnancy
Preventing Obesity in Children
Cherry Extract for the Treatment of Gout

Administration:

The competition is open to all medical, dental, nursing and midwifery students, and students of professions allied to medicine in the UK and is administered by Professor David Bender. He notifies all training colleges early in the year, collects the entries, sends the anonymized entries to the judges, and notifies all participants of the results.

Results:

As before, all entries were judged 'blind' by the five judges involved in this year's competition.

A total of 94 entries were received (41 fewer than last year), of which 60 (63.8%) ranked the protocols in the correct order. Of 76 entries from medical/dental students, 51 (67%) ranked the protocols correctly, whilst the corresponding figure for the 18 entries from nursing/midwifery/professions allied to medicine students is 9 (50%), which includes three of the seven entries from nurses. The finding that, despite concerted efforts in publicising the competition, only seven nurses/midwives entered (compared to 21 in 2012), and only three gave the correct ranking, is disappointing. This obviously suggests the need for better awareness among, and training of, nurses/midwives in the field of evidence-based medicine, especially as they are often the first port of call when patients/members of the public seek professional guidance about medical claims made in the media. Despite 63.8 % of entries having placed the protocols in the correct order, their descriptive reasoning of why they had done so, and in identifying serious flaws in some of the protocols, were disappointing. As in earlier years, many failed to spot that specific protocols lacked ethics committee approval or informed patient consent, while other entries concentrated on less important aspects, whilst failing to note critical omissions, such as lack of a control group or assessor blinding, factors that are more likely to influence the outcome of a trial. For this reason, there are no runners-up this year among the medical/dental students, and only one runner-up among the nursing/midwifery/professions allied to medicine. Our findings suggest that more intensive training in what constitutes a 'good quality' research protocol is needed, to enable our future doctors and nurses to critically appraise research findings and claims for efficacy or superiority of new products/procedures.

Despite the above reservations, we are pleased that a minority of entrants excelled in their appraisals, and we are happy to extend our admiration and congratulations to them. Their prizes will be awarded by HealthWatch President Nick Ross at the HealthWatch AGM on 24th October 2013. They are:

Medical Students

Joint winners:	Dylan Mac Lochlainn	University College London
	Claire Wood	University of Glasgow

Nursing/Midwifery/Professions Allied to Medicine

Winner:	Henry Lancashire	University College London
Runner-up:	Shuchang Liu	University College London

Funding:

HealthWatch is most grateful to Professor John Garrow for his generosity in having provided the funding for the 2013 competition.

We extend our thanks to Cambridge University Press for having generously agreed to sponsor the competition from 2014, and to Professor David Bender for his help in securing this funding.

Acknowledgements:

The HealthWatch committee thank all those involved in the organisation and scientific input/assessments of this year's competition, specifically: David Bender, Debra Bick, Walli Bounds, Roger Fiskien, Sally Gordon Boyd, Anil Patel, and Gillian Robinson. Without their dedication and generously given support, this important competition would not have been possible.

9) HealthWatch Award

Nick Ross presented the 2013 HealthWatch Award to Dr Fiona Godlee, Editor-in-Chief, BMJ, for outstanding leadership in the pursuit of medical truth.

The meeting closed at 20:30, followed by a buffet supper.