

Editorial for the JASGBI Newsletter

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Dear Colleagues

Welcome to the Spring 2014 issue of the Journal of the ASGBI, and to the first ever wholly electronic edition. We have been in discussion for some time about how best to take advantage of modern technology to contain the substantial costs of printing, storing and distributing the ASGBI Publication Portfolio, which includes this Newsletter and our regular Issues in Professional Practice; while retaining the reader experience which has made our publications so popular with our members and in the wider world.

The electronic future

We are therefore delighted that Steve Johnson, of Red Apple Design, our long standing design partner and typesetter, has risen to the technical challenge of moving us on line with an attractive, high resolution and very functional and multi-platform screen reading system for the Journal. We intend that Steve's solution will be our core publishing system from now on, and that our back catalogue of Journals, Newsletters and Issues in Professional Practice will be progressively backloaded onto the servers in the new format.

This will also allow the development of new income streams from beyond our subscribing members, and it will provide hitherto unexplored functionality, such as links from the Journal to relevant web material. While we regret the passing and the "take anywhere" convenience of the paper Journal, we believe that the added functionality and capabilities of our new systems will soon mitigate the sense of loss. Of course we anticipate teething problems, and we will be very open to constructive feedback on how to further improve the system.

The electronic revolution does not end as you turn the last page of the Journal. Nick Markham has led us in visionary form as Director of Informatics to the brave new world of the paperless Congress, which he describes elsewhere in this issue. For the first time ever, the forthcoming Congress in Harrogate will be managed entirely on an electronic system, with each delegate using an iPad to view posters, organise sessions, and communicate with other attendees. The benefits extend beyond the Congress, as we integrate the content with our web site such that, for example, posters may continue to be displayed and viewed long after the Congress Centre doors have closed.

There will be a steep learning curve as we learn to integrate our digital systems and to provide new services and functionality for our members, whose support through the annual subscription process is the foundation upon which we are building for the future.

The ASGBI and the BJS

The ASGBI and the BJS have long enjoyed a close partnership. Some years ago, ownership of the BJS passed to the BJS Society. The ASGBI has continued pro bono to collect subscriptions from its members for the BJS and to act as a conduit for the print version of the BJS to our members, many of whom have enjoyed and valued this resource.

Late in 2013, the BJS Society and the Publishers of the BJS, Blackwell-Wiley, notified us of its intention to move immediately and directly to its preferred on line distribution model from January 2014 onwards. We had no time to make any of the necessary and complex technical adjustments to our membership systems to accommodate a “mixed economy” of print and digital subscriptions, and nor were we resourced by the BJS Society to do so. We therefore agreed to move directly to the “on line only model”, with a modest reduction in our membership rates for 2014.

We recognised from the outset that 2014 would be a year of technical change, upheaval and reflection upon the relationship between the ASGBI and the BJS Society. We also recognise that while some digitally literate members of the ASGBI are comfortable with the changes, the majority of members who have been accustomed to the excellent print version of the BJS arriving regularly through the postbox are less than enamoured with the new model, whereby readers currently have to seek out the BJS website, login in and then read the individual papers as PDF documents.

We can only apologise for the disruption to the high standard of service in BJS delivery which our members have come to associate with the ASGBI but which in fact is in the technical control of the BJS Society and the Publishers. We are working urgently and in collegiate fashion substantially to improve the on line BJS Readership experience in line with our own digital publishing strategy, and to secure the cost savings from the on line model for our members. We thank you for your understanding while the IT Gurus get to work.

The work of the ASGBI Executive Board and Council

The primary professional function of the ASGBI remains as the official body charged with the oversight of the Specialist Advisory Committee (SAC) in General Surgery, which is one of 10 such GMC mandated SACs covering the breadth of the surgical disciplines. The SAC plays a major role in curriculum and workforce development. Credit must go as ever to Gareth Griffiths for the diligence and unstinting attention to detail which is essential in the execution of his role as the SAC Lead for the ASGBI.

The GMC has made it clear that it does not foresee nor will it permit further fragmentation of general surgical curriculum. The broad brush Greenaway Review on the future structure of medical training in the UK has exercised us considerably since its release in the Autumn of 2013, in respect of matching its ambitions to the practical realities of ensuring effective speciality and subspeciality training in the various general surgical disciplines.

Concurrently, we are very conscious of the demands of Emergency Service Provision and of career development for “Emergency Surgeons”, for whom a number of consultant appointments have been made in the past two years. We are most grateful to Iain Anderson for his work and guidance as the Association’s Director of Emergency Surgery in steering us through these uncharted waters. We are delighted to note Iain’s award of the MBE for his services to Medicine in the New Year’s Honours, although sorry to learn that this does not as yet wholly excuse him from domestic chores.

In order to deliver the best possible professional systems and outcomes for surgeons in all of the disciplines still affiliated to General Surgery, whether or not they are members of the ASGBI, the ASGBI Executive recognises the importance of a harmonious working partnership with all of the representative subspeciality associations in the field, including the

ACPGBI, AUGIS and the ABS. We seek to engage continuously and constructively with all of our partner associations, through inclusive Council meetings at Senior Executive level, and through regular dialogue on strategic matters. We are also studying the opportunities for economies of scale in shared service and back office provision, and we thank Professor Nick Gair for his leadership as Chief Executive of the Association in continuing discussions with our host institution, the Royal College of Surgeons of England; and with the Federation of Surgical Speciality Associations, the FSSA, which is playing an increasingly influential role in addressing cross speciality issues from its base within the College.

There are many other issues which exercise the Executive Board, as for example the development of the national “Publication of Individual Surgical Outcomes” programme; Revalidation; and the charitable work and resources of the Surgical Foundation. We are also conscious of our remit to develop new facilities and practical resources for our members, one highlight of which is the Surgical Indemnity Scheme. This is delivering significant savings to members in private practice insurance fees on an individualised basis.

Education & Innovation: The 2014 International Surgical Congress in Harrogate

And so to the 2014 ASGBI Congress itself. Gordon Carlson has put in long hours as the Programme Director to create a wide ranging and attractive programme which we hope will appeal to a large constituency of members and delegates. We owe him a huge debt of thanks for his effort and his diligence.

We are delighted to welcome so many partner organisations, including the International Conference on Surgical Education and Training, ICOSET; The Association of Trauma and Military Surgery, ATMS; the Surgical Outcomes Club of Great Britain and Ireland, SOC-GBI; the Section of Surgery of the European Union of Medical Specialists, UEMS; The Clinical Studies Group of the National Cancer Research Institute, NCRI; the International Surgical Leaders’ Forum; The Association of Surgeons in Primary Care, ASPC; and the UK Medical Students Association, UKMSA.

The present issue of the Journal

And so to the contents of this issue of the Journal. We seek to provide as eclectic and diverse a coverage as possible of matters of direct and indirect interest in the lives of general

surgeons, and to provide a forum for our Travelling Fellows and beneficiaries to report back on their experiences. I am particularly grateful to our stalwart contributors, notably Mick Crumplin, whose series on Surgery and Battle Trauma has been met with much appreciation; and to Pierce Grace, whose sagacious observations on professional life in Ireland should be read with care by those who wonder how we will cope if and when the axe is taken to public health expenditure during the next Parliament.

As ever, we welcome and value your thoughts, your feedback and your contributions to the work of your Association and to our publication programme. We are continually grateful to our loyal, tolerant and hard working office team, whose energies, flexibility and dedication make everything possible on your behalf.