



MEDICAL
JOURNALISTS'
ASSOCIATION

Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2023

19:00 Thursday November 2, 2023

Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Minutes

NB: Quorum required is 20 full members

In attendance: Nigel Praities (Chair), Jane Symons (Vice-Chair), Emma Wilkinson (Vice-Chair), Sarah Comery (Treasurer), Dawn Connelly (Membership Secretary), Sallie Robins (Administrator), Aasma Day, Lucy Elkins, Nicola Hill, John Illman, Shaun Lintern, Lawrence McGinty, Jill Palmer, Isla Whitcroft, Jessica Beresford (student rep), Jenny Bryan, Alan Maryon-Davis, Carol Harris, Ellie Broughton, Lyndon Gee, Mary Black, Raanan Gillon, Richenda Power

1. Minutes of the 2022 AGM held October 20, for approval

Paper: Minutes of the 2022 AGM

Action: The minutes were approved

2. Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda

No matters arising

4. Chair's report

Paper: MJA Chair's AGM report

The Chair, Nigel Praities, presented his report and announced that he was standing down as chair after two years in post.

Action: The AGM gave a vote of thanks for everything Nigel had done in his time as chair.

5. Honorary treasurer's report: MJA Financial Accounts Year End 31 January 2023

Paper: Treasurer's report/Financial accounts (attached)

The Treasurer outlined that the accounts to end of 31 January 2023 showed a very successful financial year, there had been a big increase in sponsorship so that the MJA ended the year with more than its agreed level of reserves (the agreed level of reserves is £10K). Membership numbers had remained steady. However the current year was looking very problematic financially as there had been a significant reduction in sponsorship for the awards and currently the MJA did not have its required level of reserves and had not raised enough in sponsorship and membership to cover its running costs. The Treasurer reported that a plan had been put in place by the EC and Honorary Auditors to address the current financial difficulties and that a finance subcommittee had been set up at the last EC meeting. Jane Symons asked all members to provide leads to the EC for sponsorship.

6. Election of executive committee

Only 13 individuals are standing for election, there is therefore no required ballot, and the AGM is asked to ratify these nominations.

The following existing members of the MJA EC have been nominated for re-election by Nigel Praities:

Nicola Hill, Lawrence McGinty, Sarah Nuttall, Jill Palmer, Jane Symons, Lucy Elkins, Dawn Connelly, Isla Whitcroft, John Illman, Emma Wilkinson, Aasma Day, Shaun Lintern, Nigel Praities

The AGM are asked to give a vote of thanks to EC retiring members: Thea Jourdan and Elisabeth Mahase

NB: Officers of the MJA are appointed by the EC (not the AGM) after the AGM has approved the election of all EC members.

Nigel Praities is standing down as Chair of the MJA and the EC plan to appoint Shaun Lintern as Chair. Shaun Lintern said it was a privilege to be asked to be Chair of the MJA. He had first learned of the MJA 10 years ago when he came to London to accept his first MJA award and now wanted to contribute to making the MJA an association that its members receive benefit from and are proud of.

Jess Beresford, the MJA Student Rep (a co-opted position rather than elected) reported that there was a strategy in place to continue to grow student membership and awareness of the MJA amongst students.

Action: The AGM ratified the appointment of the 13 nominated EC members. A vote of thanks was given to retiring EC members Thea Jourdan and Elisabeth Mahase.

7. Changes to the Constitution

No proposed changes were received by the administrator nor proposed by the EC

8. Motions for Debate

No motions were received by the administrator nor proposed by the EC

9. Honorary Membership

The AGM are asked to consider making long standing MJA member Caroline Richmond an Honorary Member – Jane Symons/John Illman

Extract from constitution:

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP shall be offered only by majority vote at an Annual General Meeting to people whose services to the Association (or whose distinction in the fields of journalism or healthcare) the Association wishes to acknowledge. Honorary members shall have full voting rights but pay no annual subscription.

Caroline was nominated by vice-chair Jane Symons who explained how she came to know Caroline in a pastoral role, after she alerted the committee that another member was in need of support. She describes Caroline as a compassionate and feisty journalist who, with typical candour, now acknowledges that she is approaching death. The nomination was seconded by John Illman who provided the following tribute to Caroline in support of her Honorary Membership:

Caroline Richmond is a founder member of the HealthWatch charity and is known for her fearless and sometimes outspoken journalism.

HealthWatch (now HealthSense and originally The Campaign against Health Fraud)) was formed by 1988 to oppose ineffective alternative treatments. Other co-founders included broadcaster Nick Ross, pathologist Professor Vincent Marks and cancer surgeon Michael Baum. Baum feared for women whose breast cancer had disintegrated into suppurating sores because they'd shunned conventional treatment for ineffective alternative ones.

Now retired and poorly with multiple conditions, Caroline, a witty, elegant, stylish writer was European correspondent and a contributing writer to the Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ). She also wrote memorable pieces for The Spectator and was co-author with Vincent Marks of The Insulin Murders.

She was perhaps best known as an obituarist. She wrote unflinchingly in the BMJ that the late Dr David Horrobin, passionate promoter of evening primrose oil, "may prove to be the greatest snake oil salesman of his age." Angry responses by BMJ readers generated an 86-page print-out, but the then editor, Dr Richard Smith, robustly defended Richmond.

Reporting in the CMAJ, Dr Naomi Marks quoted Smith as saying: "Medicine has a culture of not speaking ill of the dead. What quite a lot of our readers want is what I call glorified death notices, but we want serious journalistic pieces that tell stories and make a judgement on a character. We want more light and shade."

Action: The AGM unanimously agreed to award Honorary Membership of the MJA to Caroline Richmond.

10. Appointment of honorary auditor(s)

Extract from the constitution:

An auditor shall be appointed annually by the Association at the Annual General Meeting, who shall examine the Association's accounts, and indicate in writing their approval or otherwise.

The existing auditors are Olivia Timbs, and Jenny Bryan. Both are happy to be appointed for a further year.

Action: The AGM unanimously agreed to the appointment of Olivia Timbs and Jenny Bryan as Honorary Auditors.

10 Any other business

Ellie Broughton raised the issue of the MJA twitter account and 'aggressive' tweets aimed at Pride in STEM. She asked that the MJA confirm that it is supportive and welcoming to LGBTQ+ members. The Chair responded that the tweet in question had been deleted and that the MJA was committed to maintain a welcoming and supportive environment for all members.

Mary Black asked if the MJA had any policies relating to the environment and whether environmental factors were considered when organising events. It was noted that travel had reduced significantly over past years due to many events now taking place online.

Action: Mary Black to assist the EC with drawing up a simple environmental policy

Mary Black also raised the question of the MJA having affiliations to other organisations as this can increase membership, Lyndon Gee also suggested this could increase the audience at MJA events. Jane Symons responded that the MJA did this in an informal way rather than having explicit affiliations.

Action: Thanks were given to all members who had taken the time to take part in and contribute to the AGM

The next AGM will be held in October/November 2024