

MJA AGM 2025

Chair's report

I was appointed chair of the MJA in November 2023 and this is my first report after a full year. In short the year has been a success but this has come despite a number of severe challenges that have buffeted us. A number of serious risks remain and need to be aired in this AGM update which I will detail later in a flagrant attempt to bury bad news.

We began the year confronting what seemed like an insurmountable financial crisis after a particularly bad year of sponsorship income. As our treasurer will detail, we effectively ended the year with a loss. We delayed payments - including awards prizes - and the executive committee had to face up to the reality and at one stage even discussed liabilities in the event the MJA had to be wound up. Talk about a baptism of fire!

But I come to the 2025 AGM able to report a hugely successful turnaround of the situation. Immediate steps were taken to reduce costs and we raised membership by £5 - the first rise for many years. A finance sub-committee was established and the EC re-doubled its efforts to re-engage with sponsors and to find new ones. We also successfully negotiated a new home for the MJA Awards on the top floor of the News UK Building. We end the year with enough money to meet our reserves commitment. Phew!

A particular highlight of our year was the annual symposium on building trust in medical journalism, hosted at City University. Under the leadership of vice-chair Emma Wilkinson, this event continues to grow and I am excited for this year's event, details of which will be announced shortly.

Another hit was our event with now health secretary Wes Streeting during the heat of the general election campaign. We had a packed room for the event with 140 odd members and guests, supported by the MHP Group. I am pleased to announce we will continue this event in the guise of a new annual MJA Lecture event - stay tuned for announcements coming soon.

Working with MHP on the event opened us up to discussions with them on forming a new partnership that will bring the MJA income but also benefit members with new exclusive news generating briefings with MHP clients plus opportunities for members on an individual basis. We negotiated clear editorial controls and a code of conduct that you can access online.

However, I must be candid about some other significant challenges that we face. The departure of our long-standing administrator, Sallie Robbins, was a considerable blow to the organization. Her experience and dedication will be greatly missed. Our new permanent administrator Rosalie Smith will begin work for us in February but I would ask members to be patient as she gets to grips with the role.

Our website, which has served us for many years, is showing its age and requires substantial updating. This will be a major project going forward that we cannot really delay anymore and we'll be looking at that in 2025 but it won't be a quick fix. If any members with expertise in the area wish to help us, get in touch.

What concerns me most at the moment is member engagement. Some events have been poorly attended and the response from members to call outs and our members survey for example, has been extremely lacklustre. This raises fundamental questions about our purpose and future direction. We need to understand whether this reflects the changing needs of our membership, the pressures of modern journalism, or if we need to radically rethink our approach to member services in the context of tight finances and a largely volunteer committee.

If you haven't already done so, I strongly encourage you to complete our members survey – it remains open and we want to hear from every member about how we can better serve you.

So there are challenges but opportunities and I am excited for the plans the EC is working on for the year ahead.

My appeal to members would be if you have ideas, articles they want to publish on our website or even fancy joining the EC to help us out, please do get in touch with me.

Shaun Lintern
Chairman, Medical Journalists' Association
Health Editor, The Sunday Times