

MJA NEWS

The newsletter of the Medical Journalists' Association

Spring 2014



Thyme to enter the Summer Awards

Following the positive feedback from all who attended this year's Winter Awards the MJA will return to BMA House for our Summer Awards, highlight of the MJA year and, weather permitting, we should be able to enjoy the BMA Council's herb garden and courtyard (see below). *Philippa Pigache* introduces the awards.

Altogether, nine awards will be presented on Wednesday, July 9 – invitations will reach your inbox in due course. Categories this year include Editor of a health or medical publication and entrants will be judged specifically in relation to the resources at their disposal, so that small publications are not disadvantaged by larger titles. We are also offering a Digital innovation award, where judges will be looking for well-executed digital products, which could include a data-rich info-graphic linked to a specific article, or it could be a website redesign, smart-phone app, or creative use of social media. With both these awards the entry form will include room for back-up information about goals, launch date, and evidence of impact and success. All other entrants will have the option of writing a short contextual statement to support their entries, should they so wish. A third new award will be for journalists outside London, working for national or regional publications and/or broadcast outlets in one of the four UK countries.

Three new awards

We will also offer awards for Consumer staff journalist of the year; Consumer freelance journalist; Medical staff journalist (in professional media); Medical freelance journalist (professional media), and Young journalist (29 or under on the closing date of the Awards). The Story of the year will be for the best coverage of care.data – the

Government's controversial, temporarily 'paused' plan to collect and share patient data. These categories are open to all media: film or sound broadcasts, print or online, depending on the audience the material was produced for.

Entrants should submit a single item only for the Story of the year award and for Digital innovation. All other awards are for a body of work and entrants should submit up to three pieces of work (or publications) via the online site linked to the MJA website, or in hard copy to a postal address.

Judges are being recruited, and we will share the names once they are signed up. Sponsors confirmed so far are, in addition to our principal and long-term sponsor Boehringer Ingelheim, Astellas Pharma, GlaxoSmithKline, Lilly and Novo Nordisk, and thanks to their continued generosity, the MJA will again be offering cheques of £750 to all individual winners, and there will be a trophy for the team behind the

winning Digital innovation entry.

MJA Summer Awards are open to all. As always, they are free to members but, as in earlier awards, we ask a small entry fee (£20) from non-members. This fee will be waived for anyone who applies to join the MJA and pays an upfront subscription before submitting their entry. Full details of how to pay will be included on the entry form.

Timing

Launch: the MJA website awards section (www.mjauk.org/awards) will be loaded with the 2014 Awards entry form and instructions on April 25. Closing date: you have until Tuesday, May 27 to submit your entries. We will then publish shortlisted entrants in the Summer *MJA News*, in June, and the awards ceremony will be held on July 9, at BMA House, in London. Put the dates in your diary now, and spread the word to friends and colleagues. If not members, encourage them to join, and offer to sponsor them. ♦

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The BMA Council's private courtyard and garden was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. It includes a range of medicinal herbs. Weather permitting, the MJA should be able to enjoy it for the presentation of the Summer Awards this year.

NoticeBoard

Commercially-sponsored MJA meetings: a hot potato

The MJA's relationship with big pharma and the PR companies that represent them has had its ups and downs over the years. We currently have what most regard as a well-balanced arrangement with Summer and Winter Awards sponsors which are generous with no strings attached other than coming to presentations and sharing a jar with the journo.

But how would members feel if an individual drug company or representing PR asked the MJA to run a meeting they had chosen? Not pushing a particular drug obviously (against all the rules) but exploring a research area of shared interest with generous funding to back it. Such a request recently came to the MJA committee and divided members right down the middle. Some thought that, observing criteria for transparency and balance, we should not not look a gift-horse in the mouth when spare funds could be used for additional member benefits like training. Others felt that it was not just important to be independent, but that the MJA had to be seen to be totally independent by the wider media community.

The offer was refused, but we have recorded some members' widely divergent views which are posted on the MJA website. Please will all members go to mjauk.org, and join the discussion by posting in the comment box underneath. We really need to know your views.

New members

Carolyn Hughes is currently the editor of *Drug News*, a weekly newsletter covering the latest developments in pharmaceutical R&D. She writes stories covering clinical trial results, drug approvals and launches, and drug licensing deals. She also edits and writes general features on aspects of the pharma industry. She has a BSc in microbiology and a PhD in mycology from the University of Cardiff, and over 20 years of experience in writing, editing and abstracting.

Faye Kirkland qualified in medicine and in neuroscience at the University of Birmingham, and went on to gain her membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners in 2010. She is currently studying for a diploma in broadcast journalism at Cardiff University and when she finishes in June hopes to combine working in general practice with journalism. Before this she worked for an NGO in Cambodia, and independently travelled around the world. She writes a column for *GP* magazine and has also done some local TV and radio plus online journalism.

Symons sorts out the MJA website

MJA vice-chair Jane Symons is taking the MJA website in hand. Go online and read the brief she has put out to tender at <http://www.mjauk.org/news/what-a-web-we-hope-weave-new-mja-site>, and then get back to us and tell us what you think. All feedback welcome.

Special discounts for MJA members

There are now even more good reasons to join and maintain your membership of the MJA, with the introduction of new member benefits. Our first offer comes from Vision Express, which is extending discounts of £30 off specs and £70 off contact lenses to all members — plus an extra voucher for a family member, too. See the website for details (www.mjauk.org/news/eye-say-what-offer-mja-members), and keep an eye out for further deals.

Remembering Stephen Pinn: 1951-2014



MJA News is sad to record that long-time member Stephen Pinn died suddenly last January, following a massive stroke at only 62. He started as a trainee journalist in 1969, on the *Surrey Daily Advertiser* and progressed through other local papers, until 1982, when he became first news editor, then deputy editor of *Doctor* and *Hospital Doctor*, and finally editor of *Hospital Doctor*, a position he held until 1991, when he left to become a highly successful freelance running his own medical writing agency.

In his private life Stephen was a fiercely competitive table-tennis player, winning many trophies over 40 years in the Guildford Table Tennis League. I found him a larger-than-life presence, whose welcoming smile lit up whatever press room I met him in. He is survived by Mary and their two children, Sophie and Henry. Mary, also a medical journalist, says she would like to keep in touch with colleagues.

Her email is pinnmary@btconnect.com. MJA members wishing to make a donation in memory of Stephen could go to the Teenage Cancer Trust (www.teenagecancertrust.org).

Ian Mason



Winter Awards 2013 winners

The Winter Awards were presented late in January, this time at a new location: BMA House in Tavistock Square. Space was generous, spreading over two rooms, which was just as well since more than 120 members, entrants and guests thronged through them, loudly demanding more seating. *Philippa Pigache* reports.

David Payne, MJA vice-chair and editor of *bmj.com* chaired the evening and introduced the distinguished compère – Colin Blakemore, professor of neuroscience and philosophy in the School of Advanced Study, University of London, professor of neuroscience at the University of Oxford, and former head of the Medical Research Council (inset left above, with David). A new award for a Short science film, on a controversial topic, *Why are we still using electroconvulsive therapy?*, was taken by a *Newsnight* team led by James Clayton (seen above with trophy between Jim Reed, left, and camera man Justin Web). Judge Dominic Byrne, a freelance radio and video producer, said it was a '...well-crafted, balanced discussion with good access, fluently told and beautifully shot.'

A BBC Radio 4 programme, *Surgeons under scrutiny*, from Matthew Hill and Daniel Tetlow, took the award for Investigative reporting/scoop (consumer media). The programme had 'a strong focus on how things could be improved, and powerful but measured use of first-hand accounts,' said judge Michelle Dixon, director of communications for the BMA. *The Guardian's* Denis Campbell won the Interview award for one with Bruce Keogh, medical director of NHS England, and Anne Wollenberg's *My battle with motor neurone disease – Neil Platt's last interview*, which also appeared in *The Guardian*, won the new Personal story award. Robin McKie's *Could this fish be a cure for cancer?* in *The Observer* won Medical science

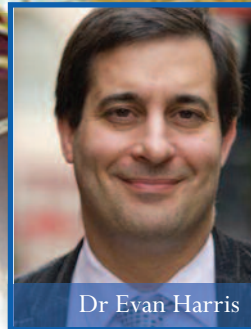
explained; 'a fascinating primer on genetics, bioinformatics and models of disease,' said judge Sile Lane, director of campaigns with Sense about Science.

The award for Investigative reporting/scoop (professional media) went to Jaimie Kaffash for an article in *Pulse*, *Leaked report casts doubt over NHS Direct's 'overall viability' in wake of NHS 111 failings*. A new award for a Column or opinion piece, taken by Rob Galloway – *The A&E doctor who says bringing the elderly back from death can be cruel and pointless* – was written under the pseudonym Dr Nick Edwards for the *Daily Mail*. The Excellence in journalistic skills award was won by Vivienne Parry with *The Enemy Within – 50 years of fighting cancer*, a film produced for Cancer Research UK and Roche.

Another new award was given for a Local health campaign and was won by Adam Gretton for a campaign called Ambulance Watch, in the *Eastern Daily Press*. 'Great tenacity,' said judge and former award-winner Adele Waters. 'Just the sort of journalism we should be encouraging.'

Thanks again go to this year's generous sponsors: Astellas, the BMA, GlaxoSmithKline, Lilly, Merck Sharp & Dohme, Novo Nordisk and Roche. (You can read a full report on the Winter Awards, which also lists the many commended entries if you go to the MJA website and click on, www.mjauk.org. More pictures overleaf.)

Court will convene to put Trials on Trial



Dr Evan Harris



Professor Stephen Senn



Dr Stephanie Harriman



Brian Deer



Dr Trish Groves

Last October the MJA ran a meeting on the interpretation of clinical trials. On May 22, in the panelled courtroom on the first floor of Browns Restaurant Bar & Brasserie in St Martin's Lane, we are organising an event that will focus upon another aspect of clinical trials: is their publication all it is cracked up to be? *Jane Symons* provides a foretaste of what's in store.

The health news agenda is often driven by clinical trials. Whether we work for consumer publications, or specialist medical or trade journals, the latest study or meta-analysis is always grist to the media mill. But is the current system of publishing clinical trials fit for purpose? Or are peer-reviewed journals the weakest link in a chain of communication that lets down doctors, patients and the regulatory bodies charged with making decisions on access to new medicines? And, as journalists, how much faith should we place in peer review? The sorry saga of *The Lancet* and Andrew Wakefield's now thoroughly-debunked claims of a link between autism and the MMR vaccine shows how easy it is to shoot the media messenger and blame the press when peer review falls short.

Trials are again in the spotlight with the recently published Cochrane Review into the antiviral drug Tamiflu and the ongoing AllTrials campaign which calls on governments, regulators and research bodies to ensure that the results of all trials – past and present – are registered and freely available, along with the full methodology and data (www.alltrials.net/).

To answer some of the questions raised by these issues, the MJA has assembled an impressive panel of expert witnesses for a meeting when we put Trials on Trial. Justice (for the day) Nicola Hill will oversee proceedings as our 'barristers', Susan Mayor and MJA chair, Victoria Lambert, call a series of expert witnesses – see above – to supply evidence on this complex topic. You, our audience and jury, will have the opportunity to further cross-examine witnesses before delivering your verdict, and finally adjourning for discussion, debate and a drink.

MJA members are now formally called for jury duty at 6.30 p.m., on May 22, at Browns Courtrooms in St Martin's Lane. An invitation will be posted on the MJA website shortly and you will be able to confirm your attendance via the comments link underneath.

Thanks to Jane Feinmann for her work in organising the meeting.

Expert witnesses

Dr Evan Harris is the former LibDem MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, and a passionate advocate for both free speech and the Hacked Off campaign. He was a prominent supporter of Simon Singh during his libel case against the British Chiropractic Association.

Professor Stephen Senn is a statistician and author of a number of books, including *Dicing with Death: Chance, Risk and Health* and *Statistical Issues in Drug Development*. Formerly a professor of pharmaceutical and health statistics at University College London, he now lives in Luxembourg working as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry for the Centre de Recherche Public de la Santé. He wrote *Bad JAMA*, a response to Ben Goldacre's book *Bad Pharma*, and has a nice line in aphorisms (see his homepage at www.senns.demon.co.uk/home.html).

Dr Stephanie Harriman is deputy medical editor at BioMed Central where her focus is on the medical journals produced by this pioneering online publishing company. She has helped to develop open peer review, which most of the company's journals now use – and has co-published research on the impact on transparency of this development.

Brian Deer is an investigative journalist best known for enquiries into the drug industry, medicine and social issues for *The Sunday Times*. He exposed the flaws of Andrew Wakefield's study into MMR and autism, and was instrumental in the withdrawal of the antibiotic Septrin. He has won two British Press Awards for his work. (See more: <http://briandeer.com/>.)

Dr Trish Groves is editor-in-chief of *BMJ Open* and a member of the AllTrials campaign. She has sat on a number of research-related organisations, including the Committee on Publication of Ethics and the CONSORT 2010 group on reporting randomised controlled trials. She trained in medicine at London's Royal Free School of Medicine and then specialised in psychiatry. She describes herself as an optimist and sceptic, and in 1995 *The Consumer Guide to Mental Health*, of which she was joint author, won one of the first MJA book awards. ♦



Lady Dorothy Harvey (in frame), wife of the nephew of William Harvey, discoverer of the circulation of the blood, by Sir Godfrey Kneller, and David Payne, chair

Photos: Richenda Power

Shock, horror! FOI meeting reveals Ants in the birthing pool

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act of 2000 allows those who follow the correct procedure, to 'have access to official information and the right to request information from any public authority'. Naturally, this is a rich source of material for journalists, and some 40 MJA members attended an evening on how to get the most out of FOI requests at the Medical Society of London in March. Our two speakers were Matthew Davis, Brighton-based freelance journalist of some 20 years' experience, who runs a press agency and also teaches journalists about FOI (above right), and Maurice Frankel, since 1987 director of the UK Campaign for Freedom of Information (www.cfoi.org.uk).

Matthew Davis has been submitting five to six FOI requests every week since 2005, and makes a living off the back of it. (See his website: www.foinews.co.uk.) His switch from 'conventional' journalism to FOI-based stories was prompted by what he called a 'nerdish love for data' – whether they come in the shape of league tables, cricket scores, or similar – and a deep mistrust of authority.

He provided examples of how he works with the Act and the stories one can get out of it. And he listed many of the public organisations you can approach for data, from the DoH to the DVLA. Matthew's golden rule, he said, was to start with the headline or story he would like to write (with *Ants in the birthing pool* he just got lucky) and then to embark upon finding data that would make the story stand up.

Maurice Frankel represents an organisation that monitors and defends the FOI Act. It advises the public on using it,

encourages good practice by authorities, provides FOI training for those who have to answer requests, and generally aims to improve how the Act works. His presentation was a primer for novice journalists on how to make FOI requests, and how not to. He had tabulated practical steps to follow: which bodies to approach, what pitfalls might occur, what problems could be anticipated, and how to get around them when they arose, and gave examples of what you can and cannot ask for, and the grounds on which applications might legitimately be rejected. Maurice recommended doing careful research first before filing an application – and trying to think the way the organisation you are approaching would think, so that you formulate a meaningful request that it could reasonably be expected to answer. (Maurice's PowerPoint presentation will be available on the MJA website Resources section shortly.)

Maurice said that while there was in principle no limit to the stories that might come out of FOI applications, to him the Act was above all significant as an expression of democracy in action: transparency, promoting change, and informing the public. Unfortunately, he concluded, it has turned out to be rather too much of a good thing in some ways, and the government is currently working on restricting access.

There followed many questions, and some lively discussion. It was a really great evening. And, a few days later, when I was going home on the train, I came across a headline in London's free *Metro* newspaper, 3,000 IVF embryos are destroyed every week (*Metro*, April 2, 2014, page 9). 'Ah ha,' I thought to myself, 'I know where they got that from.'

♦ Birte Twisselmann

Winter Awards at BMA House



From left: Dorothy Grace Elder, shortlisted in Local health campaign, judge Justine Hancock, Rob Galloway, Column and opinion piece winner, and Chloe Lambert, shortlisted in Personal story



Judge Rita Som, editor of Independent Nurse, with Awards organiser Simon Warne



Judge Olivia Timbs with Robin McKie, Medical science explained winner, and his daughter Anna (left)



Judge Adele Waters, and former MJA chair John Illman



BMA House serves some exceedingly good puddings



From left, members Evelyn Vittery, Clare Dover and Jenny Botsford



Denis Campbell, Interview winner, and Anne Wollenberg, Personal story winner



Judge Richard Vize and Kate McKann, lobby correspondent at City AM



Wendy Moore is one of the MJA's most successful authors. Here she describes how her first book, *The Knife Man*, is being adapted as a possible television series. The book, a biography of the pioneering 18th-century surgeon John Hunter, won the MJA's Open Consumer Book award in 2005.

From the first moment I encountered the maverick John Hunter I knew he had star qualities. A life-saving surgeon who inspired admiration and fear in equal measures; an anatomist who learned all he knew from bodies stolen from graveyards; a naturalist who dared to imagine how life on earth had first developed – Hunter had it all.

I always imagined the larger-than-life Scottish surgeon captured on film; I even speculated on the ideal actor to portray him. Yet it is 10 years since I finished the book and it is sheer chance that it is being optioned for television.

The first spark of interest came out of the blue three years ago when I had a request via my agent from the American production company Media Rights Capital to buy the film option. It was only after the contracts had been signed that I met script-writer, Rolin Jones. He'd picked up my biography by chance and approached MRC with the idea of a TV series. Only then did I discover that Rolin had in mind a fictionalised drama inspired by Hunter rather than a dramatisation of Hunter's actual life.

It was a bit of a shock. Yet I could see the advantages too. A fictionalised drama would provide the creative freedom to capture Hunter's world without being tied to inconvenient dates and events. The script follows the ups and downs of one John Tattersal, a hard-drinking, hard-living surgeon closely styled on the real Hunter. During the ensuing three years I've

worked closely with Rolin as he has crafted a madcap, laudanum-fuelled, foul-mouthed world peopled by the high society and low life of Georgian England. We've become good friends as he has spurred the main character to wilder excesses, and I have suggested genuinely Georgian swear words.

Earlier this year the script was accepted by AMC Studios, which produces *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*, for a possible TV series entitled *Knifeman*. The pilot begins filming in June and is being directed by Brian Percival (*The Book Thief* and *Downton Abbey*) and, if accepted, the series should screen next year.

Now that casting has begun, sets are being created and locations chosen, I can't help having mixed feelings. It's thrilling, of course, that the character I fleshed out will finally step into the limelight – and the funds will be welcome, too – but a little scary at the same time. Like Frankenstein's monster, the book I spent years crafting in lonely isolation is now set to come to life – and I have little or no control over its destiny. As technical consultant to the series, I will aim to ensure that the medical and historical detail is as authentic as possible. And hopefully what *Mad Men* has done for the '60s will bring fresh audiences to the fascinating story of 18th-century medicine. ♦

Wendy Moore

Wendy's latest book, *How to Create the Perfect Wife*, is now out in paperback

One night at the Jacaranda, by Carol Cooper.

E-book, and CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, £5.92

Carol Cooper is a GP, medical journalist, and author of successful non-fiction, but this is her first novel, produced with the help of Amazon's self-publishing platform CreateSpace. It is an impressively competent debut. It has believable characters, realistic dialogue, a vivid, modern setting, a hero in medical jeopardy, and some steamy sex. There is little danger, risk or threat, but there is a death, and there are misunderstandings that are all resolved in the end. As a plus there are no really nasty people in it, though there is duplicity and double-dealing. Here, the classic plot of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl in the end, is worked in triplicate via the device of a speed-dating evening at the trendy Jacaranda wine bar ('longest zinc bar in Marylebone'). And, without giving away too much, most couplings end up a success.

The story follows charity worker Sanjay, solicitor Laure, GP Geoff, freelance journalist Harriet, former con Dan, and harassed single mum Karen, not to mention luscious au pair

Dorotya and odd-ball Michael, through their hectic three-minute meetings at the Jacaranda and beyond, exploring their contrasted pursuit of sex, solace and love. We meet their families, friends, their work, and Sanjay's cat. (This reviewer has a penchant for books with significant cats.) Sanjay's family is drawn with particularly loving detail and his sister Sita is a great comic creation, while the author portrays the drudgery of Geoff's life in general practice with honest insight. Her medical knowledge also informs the tragic sub-plot of Sanjay's cancer diagnosis. Perhaps it is natural that the medical elements of the story are so well-managed, but Cooper also has an impressive acquaintance with modern pop music and fashion brands. Much research has gone into the background of her story.

At fewer than 400 plot-led pages, *One night at the Jacaranda* is an all-at-one-sitting good read. I really hope she revisits Sanjay's family in a sequel. ♦

Philippa Pigache

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Designed & printed by Republic Media, Harlequin Lane, Crowborough, TN6 1HU
MJA NEWS is published quarterly
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www.mjauk.org

