

We need a more useful AGM

Has the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's annual general meeting — in its current form — outlived its usefulness? When it can take place, what it can cover (the report of the previous year's activities and a financial statement) and how issues can be debated are enshrined in the Byelaws (section VI). However, with new Rules and Regulations about to be open to consultation, and set to replace the Byelaws, now might be a good moment to modernise the proceedings.

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For an annual general meeting of an organisation with over 45,000 members it is not well attended. Take away members of Council and members of Society staff who attend and it would be surprising if, over the past five to 10 years, there had been many more than 50 members there. It is traditionally held on the Wednesday evening before the branch representatives' meeting in May, starting at 7.30pm. Although this gives a chance for some members to join the meeting after work, it is not conducive to good humour.

The formal proceedings (the presentations of the annual review and the accounts) are dull. Last week, for example, they took nearly one and a half hours — too long and too late in the day for people to remain engaged. The more interesting items — adopting changes to the Code of Ethics and discussion of one motion — did not start until after 9pm, by which time tempers were beginning to fray and irritation had set in.

Ask rank-and-file members who have ever been to an AGM what their perception is about the way proceedings are conducted and they will say that nowadays they are too "managed". Although the Officers and Council members will say that they are being open and transparent, members believe that they are being excluded and that the establishment has something to hide — a perception that has gradually developed over the past 10 years.

So what could be done to improve attendance, to make members feel more involved and to restore confidence in the proceedings?

First of all, does the annual general meeting need to take place in May in London in the evening? Could it not take place in September at the British Pharmaceutical Conference in the daytime? Do the annual review and accounts really need to be covered in so much detail (particularly since both are available in printed form and on the Society website)? Should less time be spent on their presentation and more time spent on answering questions from members?

Maybe such a change in emphasis would encourage more members to attend and to hope their questions will be answered fully. Maybe more members could then be tempted back to debate issues that are more about the practice and profession of pharmacy, and less about personalities and politics.

Editor and editorial director
Olivia Timbs
Tel 020 7572 2414

Deputy editor
Andrew Haynes, *MRPharmS*
The Society section
Tel 020 7572 2421

Managing editor
Graeme Smith, *MRPharmS*
Letters and other contributions
Tel 020 7572 2426

Assistant editor
Michael Thompson
Editor — PJ Online
Tel 020 7572 2428

News editor
Harriet Adcock, *MRPharmS*
Tel 020 7572 2415

News and feature writers
Dawn Connelly, *MRPharmS*
Notice-board
Tel 020 7572 2427
Tom Moberly
Tel 020 7572 2417
Matthew Wright, *MRPharmS*
Tel 020 7572 2430

Contributions editors
Gemma Cleveland
Reviews
Tel 020 7572 2416
Lin-Nam Wang, *MRPharmS*
Continuing professional development
Tel 020 7572 2413

Production editor
Christopher Icha

Website controller
Gowan Clews
Tel 020 7572 2418

Personal assistant to the editor
Emma Kerby-Evans
Tel 020 7572 2414

Administrative assistant
Pauline Heslop
Branch meetings, copyright, permissions
Tel 020 7572 2422

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