



Founded in 1942, the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association has just entered its 64th year and is unique as the only national body that represents pharmacy students and preregistration trainees. Gautam Paul explains what the BPSA can offer.

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of the BPSA

The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association is recognised by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain as its official student branch. It is thus able to represent views and highlight issues relating to pharmacy students studying in Great Britain at the Society's annual branch representatives' meeting. In addition, members of the BPSA executive meet Council members and senior staff of the Society formally twice a year.

The BPSA is also represented on the Society's Education Committee and various steering groups that oversee research into the area of pharmacy education. This allows students to have input into the decision-making process and raise issues that affect the future of the profession, in particular those decisions regarding pharmacy education and assessment. It also gives the association a valuable opportunity to learn more about the latest developments at the Society and the wider pharmacy profession.

As well as being highly effective at representing students at a political level, the BPSA provides the perfect platform for students to get the most from their university days. It actively encourages students to learn more about the world of pharmacy around them and what the future holds as a qualified member of the profession. The BPSA has an impressive range of events and services available to its members.

BPSA representatives

Each school of pharmacy has a BPSA representative who acts as a point of contact for the association. They keep

students informed about future events and activities. The country is divided into four regions and each of these has an area co-ordinator who organises the events and keeps in touch with the representatives at local universities.

These regions are:

- ▶ **Northern** (Robert Gordon, Strathclyde and Sunderland universities)
- ▶ **Pennine** (Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool John Moores, Nottingham and De Montfort universities)
- ▶ **Western** (Aston, Bath, Cardiff, Reading and Portsmouth universities)
- ▶ **Eastern** (University of East Anglia, School of Pharmacy [London], King's College London, Medway campus of the Universities of Greenwich and Kent, Kingston, Hertfordshire and Brighton universities)

BPSA executive

The area co-ordinators work together with 13 other people to form the BPSA executive, a group of undergraduates, preregistration trainees and first-year-qualified pharmacists who volunteer to provide the services and events that the BPSA offers. For more information about the BPSA, visit our new website at www.bpsa.com

Events

Our events consist of a series of area conferences, an annual conference and a preregistration trainee conference. We also help support the Society's "Students day" at the British Pharmaceutical Conference.

Area conferences are one- or two-day events, which combine presentations,

workshops and discussions on professional or clinical subjects relevant to practice, with an evening social event.

The topics covered at these conferences are often not generally taught as part of the university syllabus, so many students appreciate the opportunity to widen their knowledge of alternative treatments, ethical dilemmas and specific patient-care issues. Over the past two years there have been days dedicated to the medicinal use of cannabis, psychiatric pharmacy, substance misuse, paediatric pharmacy, nutrition and alternative career paths.

Over the Easter holiday, one school of pharmacy is lucky enough to play host to the BPSA annual conference. More than 100 members from across the country spend a week debating issues of relevance to student welfare, the pharmacy profession and the work of the association itself. This provides students with a forum to discuss their future, decide official BPSA policy (to be presented to the Society) and meet the leaders of the profession in a relaxed environment.

The week also boasts an extensive social programme, ranging from official receptions, themed parties, a charity pub-crawl to the grand finale of the annual BPSA ball. At the end of the week the membership elects the executive for the next academic year. In 2006, the BPSA's 64th annual conference will be held in Bradford from 8–15 April. Details can be found on our website (www.bpsa.com) or by contacting the annual conference organisers through conference@bpsa.com.

A key project that BPSA is looking at this year is highlighting the role pharmacists play in improving public health. This will involve undertaking various projects in the fields of healthy living and diabetes. The BPSA hopes these campaigns will inspire future pharmacists to be actively involved with health promotion throughout their careers.

Services

The BPSA also offers a wide range of services. These include competitions,

a website, undergraduate and preregistration publications, an international student exchange programme and the "Professional development certificate" scheme. It also has a representative role for its nearly 5,000 members.

There are specific services for preregistration trainees. As part of their membership benefits, BPSA preregistration members are entitled to up to £300,000 of legal costs' insurance and membership of the Pharmacists' Defence Association, at no added cost. Preregistration members can also benefit from the preregistration graduate conference, which this year, is being held as two one-day conferences. There is also a dedicated graduate officer to help with any issues that may arise throughout the training year.

A free magazine, *Graduate Link*, is distributed to keep graduates informed of BPSA activities and give extra insight into the preregistration year. This is complemented by the BPSA's undergraduate publication, *Future Pharmacist*, which contains professional articles, approved educational exercises and updates on forthcoming association events.

The BPSA runs a number of award schemes including the "McNeil responding to symptoms competition", the "Reckitt Benckiser student of the year" competition and the UniChem award. Each of these offer fantastic prizes, as well as being impressive on your CV.

By becoming a member of the BPSA, you automatically become a member of the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation and the European Pharmaceutical Students' Association. The BPSA, working together with the IPSF, is able to offer a student exchange programme where you can spend time working abroad in over any one of 30 countries, experiencing pharmacy on an international scale.

However, by far the most successful and popular service offered is the "Professional development certificate" (PDC). Established in 2001, the PDC was produced in conjunction with the College of Pharmacy Practice as a result of members asking for accredited events, similar to the continuing professional development process carried out by pharmacists. The scheme works on a simple point collection system. Five points in one academic year results in an official Professional Development Certificate.

Points are awarded for involvement in the area conferences, the annual conference, "Credit for learning" exercises in *Future Pharmacist*, local branch meetings of the Society and BPSA competitions (excluding the UniChem Award). The BPSA has an educational development officer dedicated to managing and developing this popular scheme.

The BPSA is run voluntarily by students for students. It aims to provide opportunities for future pharmacists to develop a wider view of their chosen profession and to influence its future. To join the BPSA please contact Chinelo Onyiah, the membership secretary, at membersec@bpsa.com. Five years' membership (including the preregistration period) costs £25, or £10 for one year.

Good luck with the rest of your year, and I look forward to seeing you at a BPSA event near you soon! ✨

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