

BRITISH PHARMACEUTICAL STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association has just entered its 66th year and is the official students' branch of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. It is the only national body that represents pharmacy students and preregistration trainees. Heena Bhakta explains what the BPSA has to offer

Heena Bhakta is president of the BPSA

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Formed in 1942 and first recognised by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain as its official student branch in 1967, the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association represents student views and highlights issues relating to pharmacy students in Britain.

The BPSA is also represented on the Society's Education Committee and various steering groups overseeing 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 and, in particular, 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 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. Great Britain is divided

into areas and each of these has an area co-ordinator who organises conferences and keeps in touch with representatives and local universities. With the increase in the number of schools of pharmacy, the BPSA has introduced a new area co-ordinator to the central area of England.

These regions are:

Northern - Robert Gordon (Aberdeen), Strathclyde (Glasgow) and Sunderland universities

Pennine - Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool John Moores and Central Lancashire (Preston) universities

Central - Aston, De Montfort (Leicester), Keele, Nottingham and Wolverhampton universities

Western - Bath, Cardiff, Reading and Portsmouth universities

Eastern - University of East Anglia (Norwich), School of Pharmacy (London), King's College London, Medway at Universities of Greenwich and Kent, Kingston, Hertfordshire, Brighton

BPSA executive

The area co-ordinators are members of the BPSA executive, a group of undergraduates, preregistration trainees and newly qualified pharmacists who volunteer to provide the services and events that the BPSA offers. They can be contacted via the website.

Events

BPSA 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. 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 pharmacist prescribing, sexual health, alternative therapies, diabetes care and alternative career paths.

During the Easter holiday, BPSA holds its annual general meeting, known as the BPSA annual conference. More than 70 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 and meet the leaders of the profession in a relaxed environment.

The week also boasts an extensive social programme ranging from official receptions and themed parties to the grand finale of the annual BPSA ball. At



the end of the week the members elect the executive for the next academic year. In 2008, the BPSA's 66th annual conference will be held in Kingston-Upon-Thames. Details can be found on our website (www.bpsa.co.uk) or by contacting the annual conference organisers, Chris Tong and Roohil Yusuf, at conference@bpsa.co.uk

Services

The BPSA offers many services, and there is something for everyone. As well as three great competitions with great prizes, there are publications given to both undergraduate and preregistration trainee members. This year a brand new website was launched (www.bpsa.co.uk) thanks to Ryan Hamilton, the BPSA's IT officer. It has up-to-date information on all BPSA events and also has a members' only section with forums where pharmacy students can talk and swap tips on revision techniques as well as issues that they feel strongly about.

There are also specific services for preregistration trainees. As part of their membership benefits, BPSA preregistration trainee members are entitled to up to £300,000 of legal costs' insurance and membership of the Pharmacists' Defence Association at no extra charge. Preregistration trainee members 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 offers fantastic prizes, as well as being impressive on your curriculum vitae.

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. 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 education process carried out by pharmacists. The scheme works on a simple point collection system, with five points in one academic year resulting 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. The BPSA has an educational development officer dedicated to managing and developing the popular scheme.

The BPSA is run by students for students and aims to provide opportunities for future pharmacists to develop a better view of, and influence, our chosen profession. To join the BPSA, please contact Charlotte Mawson, the membership secretary at membersec@bpsa.co.uk. Five years' membership (including the preregistration period) costs £25, or £10 for one year. ■