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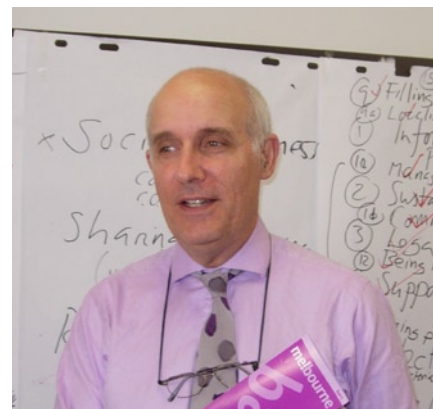
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## President's (Chair's) report

**Joe Collier** [jcollier@sghms.ac.uk](mailto:jcollier@sghms.ac.uk)

Much has happened since the last newsletter, with activity linked primarily to the meeting of the ISDB Committee in Verona in September. The meeting, which had been in the planning for over 18 months, was a great success and culminated in the provision of draft revisions to the constitution, a draft program for the 2005 Melbourne General Assembly, and the very early stages (not yet published) of a conflict of interest policy for the Society. At a personal level it also produced a change in my title—from president (adopted in the late 1990s) to chair.

Turning first to the draft revisions of the constitution. The proposals presented in Verona are the product of an enormous amount of work by the independent review working party (headed by Bozidar Vrhovac), culminating in a line-by-line discussion at the committee meeting. It is vital that our constitution reflects our beliefs and practice, is implementable, is consistent within itself (some of the original wording was conflicting) and is consistent with our work environment (when it was written, electronic



communication did not exist and the idea of the provision of information for patients was in its infancy). Some of the problems of the current constitution could have been avoided by using better phraseology in the original, but many arise because the thinking of that era is no longer applicable. The suggestions we have made are designed to meet these various challenges. They are certainly not 'changes for changes sake'. Proposed changes to the constitution are outlined in Appendix 1 to the minutes of the September committee meeting.

## Contents

<b>President's report</b>	1	<b>www.isdbweb.org: making the ISDB website more useful to members</b>	5
<b>Treasurer's report</b>	3	<b>ISDB General Assembly 2005 —draft program</b>	6
<b>Coordinator's report</b>	3		
<b>Letters to the editor</b>	3		
<b>'Conversations' with members</b>			
<i>The Sri Lanka Prescriber</i>	4		

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Adige River, Verona



Benoit Marchand and Etzel Gysling

I would ask members to look closely at the suggestions and return any comments to me by the end of April 2005. The committee will then take your suggestions into account before drafting the final proposals for debate (and hopefully acceptance) in September 2005. Our job now is to discover what the Society is feeling so that the debate can take place among like minds and is productive. Naturally, at some point in the process, the proposals will need to be checked by a legal expert.

Now to the program for the 2005 General Assembly. We believe that the program outlined on pp.6–7 will be of broad appeal and relevance. In addition to sections allocated for reviewing the business of the Society, we have divided the meeting into four themes (Communicating with Patients, Quality of Bulletins, Managing Bulletins, and Bulletins in Society) to be addressed through

plenary lectures, workshops and symposia. You will see that most of the speakers have been identified. It may be that we will have to include a 'Hot Topic' session—ideas for this will need to come later in the process. The program is now available at <[www.isdbgeneralassembly2005.org](http://www.isdbgeneralassembly2005.org)>. This General Assembly site will be updated as more details about the meeting are confirmed but it already contains some information that participants might find helpful when planning their trip and when participating.

At the next meeting of the Committee we will be discussing financial support for participants, details of which will appear both on the General Assembly website and in the next newsletter.

Please start planning your attendance now. The General Assembly is the one opportunity when we can meet, work and

build together. I believe that the bulletins we produce are a key driver towards the implementation of best practice, and that a thriving and supportive Society is essential if we are to succeed in this goal.

Turning now to my other major activity. I am delighted to say that the ISDB/WHO project on writing reviews on selected WHO Essential Medicines is on schedule and almost complete. The 21 single-drug reviews are on the WHO website <[www.who.int/medicines/organization/par/edl/expcom14/expcom05de1.shtml](http://www.who.int/medicines/organization/par/edl/expcom14/expcom05de1.shtml)> for consultation (we also hope to have them on the ISDB site). All comments are welcome and should be sent in the first instance to Robin Gray at WHO <[grayr@who.int](mailto:grayr@who.int)>. The 3 section reviews are a little delayed but might just be available on the web for comment by their due date of 1 December. Your opinions on them would also be welcome.



Maria Font and Malena Jirlow from Sweden, who was an observer at the meeting



Bozidar Vrhovac, Ksenija Makar-Ausperger, Joe Collier and John Dowden in Verona

## Treasurer's report

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Andrea Tarr

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Most of the membership fees have now been collected, and so far the total amount is slightly more than the total collected in 2003 (£10 243 [€15 130; US\$18 245] vs £9888 [€14 600; US\$17 600]). A surplus of around £20 000 (€29 000; US\$36 000) is expected to be available at the start of 2005. At the meeting in Verona in September, the committee agreed that it would be reasonable to leave around £10 000 (€14 500; US\$18 000) in the Society's account at the start of the term of office of the next committee (September 2005); this would leave at least £10 000 of Society funds available for supporting the 2005 General Assembly. Decisions on the actual amount that will be available to spend on the Melbourne meeting, and proposals for how it will be allocated, will be discussed at the meeting of the committee's executive group in January.

## Coordinator's report

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Andrea Tarr

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**"A practical manual on starting or strengthening a drug bulletin"**. You may remember from previous newsletter reports that we originally planned to finish the pilot version of the manual in April 2004. However, work on the project has been delayed and is now expected to be completed by April/May 2005 with a plan to launch the manual at the ISDB General Assembly in September 2005. The manual editorial team (Danielle Bardelay, Rokuro Hama, Andrew Herxheimer, Benoit Marchand, Andrea Tarr) is particularly keen to collect case studies and practical examples to include in the manual, and we will be contacting members to ask for help with this over the next few months.

## Letters to the editor

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### TRIPping through the evidence

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Paul McManus

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Associate editor

Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin

Searching for evidence about medicines is a time-consuming process. While the advent of the Internet greatly reduced the time needed to locate relevant information, I still found that I had to visit several websites to access high quality medical literature such as guidelines, clinical trial reports, and systematic reviews, with my list of 'favourite' sites growing by the week. The TRIP Database Plus <[www.tripdatabase.com/](http://www.tripdatabase.com/)> reduces that time enormously and provides rapid access to a wide range of reliable, clinically relevant and robust sources of evidence-based materials from around the world. And for users from developing countries, access can be provided free of charge.

The TRIP Database Plus (TRIP is an acronym for Turning Research Into Practice) searches for keywords in thousands of evidence-based records, clinical guidelines and patient information leaflets that have been systematically reviewed and selected as providing high quality medical information. Examples include: guidelines issued by the UK's National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Scottish Intercollegiate Guideline Network, the Canadian Centre for Health Technology Assessments, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, the New Zealand Guideline Group and the US's National Guideline Clearinghouse. In addition, the database searches thousands of medical images and query-answering services. As if that isn't enough, TRIP Database Plus searches PubMed using predefined search filters to identify randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews. A 'big four' filter identifies papers published in the *British Medical Journal*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *The Lancet*. TRIP can be

customised to regularly search for updates within your area of clinical interest and send you emails of the results each month.

Nonsubscribers are allowed 5 free searches of the TRIP Database Plus each week. However, more extensive use is by subscription only, with rates ranging from £35.25 (€51, US\$65) for a single user. Users from developing countries (as defined by WHO) can apply for free subscription from the website.

### Are you teaching students about drug promotion?

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Richard Laing, Sri Suryawati,

Margaret Ewen, Barbara Mintzes

[sonja@haiweb.org](mailto:sonja@haiweb.org)

Are you involved in teaching medical or pharmacy students about drug promotion? Do you have colleagues who are doing this teaching?

A joint project by the World Health Organization and Health Action International is underway to collect information on initiatives to teach medical and pharmacy students about drug promotion. We would like to hear about teaching on any aspect of promotion, whether it is critical appraisal of medicine advertisements, sponsorship of meetings, ethical issues related to interactions with the pharmaceutical industry, the regulation of drug promotion etc.

If you are involved in teaching students about promotion, please send your name and email address as soon as possible to <[sonja@haiweb.org](mailto:sonja@haiweb.org)> in an email with the subject line 'Education on drug promotion'. We will send a brief questionnaire back to you. All respondents to this survey will receive a free copy of a manual on education on drug promotion produced at the end of the project.

Thank you in advance for your help!

# 'Conversations' with members

## The Sri Lanka Prescriber

Gita Fernando [gitafernando@celltelnet.lk](mailto:gitafernando@celltelnet.lk)

### Why was *The Sri Lanka Prescriber* started?

In Sri Lanka from the 1960s independent drug information was provided to doctors by a bulletin named *The Prescriber*. This bulletin was modelled on a similar publication in the UK. It was published initially by the National Formulary Committee and subsequently by the Department of Pharmacology of the Faculty of Medicine Colombo (FMC). Financial support was given by the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s there were technical production problems leading to delays in publication. As a result the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation withdrew its financial support and a bulletin was not published for about 6 years. There was a dire need for revival of an independent bulletin and requests were made by the Ministry of Health to the Department of Pharmacology, FMC to commence publication of a bulletin. As the Head of the Department of Pharmacology at the time I

discussed the possibility of starting a bulletin with relevant authorities.

In 1992 I was fortunate to attend an ISDB meeting in Tokyo, where I met Andrew Herxheimer who was the president of ISDB at the time. I also met several other bulletin editors who encouraged me to start a bulletin. This meeting served as a catalyst for the events leading to the revival of an independent drug bulletin in Sri Lanka.

The State Pharmaceuticals Corporation agreed to sponsor the new publication and an editor of *The Prescriber*, Colvin Goonaratna, Professor of Physiology of the FMC, agreed to be the chief editor. We decided to name the new bulletin, ***The Sri Lanka Prescriber***.

### How long has the bulletin been going and how often do you publish?

*The Sri Lanka Prescriber* was first published in 1993. During that year we published only



Gita Fernando

two issues but since then we have published 4 issues every year.

### Who receives the bulletin?

We print 4550 copies of each issue. *The Sri Lanka Prescriber* is distributed by the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation. It is circulated free of charge to doctors employed by the Department of Health Services on request. The departments of pharmacology of each medical faculty distribute the bulletin to academic departments and libraries and sell copies to medical students. Copies are also sold by the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation to GPs, other specialists in the private sector and pharmacists, and through their retail outlets. It is also sent to WHO libraries (South East Asia Regional Office and Geneva) and to some ISDB members.

### What is your background and what is your role with the bulletin?

I graduated in medicine from the FMC in 1973 and was employed in the Department of Health Services from 1973 to 1984. After three years of postgraduate training in the UK I was appointed as a resident physician. In 1984, I joined the FMC as a senior lecturer in pharmacology and was promoted to associate professor in 1996. In 1997, I was appointed the Professor of Pharmacology at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, situated about 10 km away from the FMC. I am also the secretary of the Drug Evaluation Sub Committee, which provides recommendations about registration of drugs to the Ministry of Health. As an editor of *The Sri Lanka Prescriber* my tasks include taking policy decisions,



Sample copies of *The Sri Lanka Prescriber*

selecting content, commissioning authors, editing, checking the validity of information and proofreading.

## What staff and resources do you have to produce the bulletin?

There are no full-time members in the production team; we all work part-time on the bulletin. There are 3 editors and an editorial board comprising pharmacologists, medical specialists in different fields, a dental surgeon, and a pharmacist. We do not have a separate office for producing the bulletin. The editorial board meetings are held at the Department of Pharmacology, FMC and we make use of departmental computers, printers, and photocopiers. The editorial board meetings are convened by the secretary to the editorial board, who is responsible for taking minutes, writing to selected authors and liaising with the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation.

## Do you liaise with other like-minded organisations in your area?

We liaise with the Drug Information Center based in the Department of Pharmacology, FMC, and the Drug Regulatory Authority of the Ministry of Health.

## What kind of materials do you cover in your bulletin?

We publish articles to promote rational prescribing. Hence, the articles deal mainly with the treatment of disease conditions. We also publish regulatory news, drug alerts and multiple-choice questions based mainly on the articles published in each issue.

## What are your main problems and challenges for the future?

### Problems

During the last 2 years we have had problems related to printing. To cut down on printing costs the management of the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation took a decision to call for tenders when selecting printers. Such tender procedures have caused delays in printing. After several discussions the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation has now agreed to get the bulletin printed by a competent printer recommended by the editorial board.

## Challenges

We would like to cover more material in our bulletin such as reviews of new drugs, adverse drug reactions and case histories.

## www.isdbweb.org: making the ISDB website more useful to members

**Andrea Tarr** [andrea.tarr@virgin.net](mailto:andrea.tarr@virgin.net)

**Maria Font** [maria.font@ulss20.verona.it](mailto:maria.font@ulss20.verona.it)

The ISDB website now has a private area, accessible only to ISDB members. Its purpose is to help ISDB members share information, ideas and experiences. The area has three features: a forum, an index of member bulletins' contents and a library.

### Members' forum

In this area, members can ask others for help, share useful information or take part in a discussion. While it would be possible to do these things via email, the advantage of using the forum is that any member who looks in the forum section can see the information, and the information can be stored for access later. For example, if somebody wants to write a review of a certain drug, he or she can go to the forum and post a message asking if anyone else has reviewed this drug. Anyone with useful information about it can post a reply for all to see. If, sometime later, other people want to find out about the same drug, they can look in the forum and use the search facility to find any messages on this subject.

One of us (Andrea Tarr) is administrator and coordinator of the forum and will do the 'housekeeping' eg organise messages under relevant headings, delete messages that are no longer useful and create new topic areas, and will facilitate the exchange of information.

### Index of bulletins

In this area we are beginning to collate the contents lists of ISDB member bulletins, so that members can easily find out what articles other member bulletins have published. The contents lists are organised by language (currently English, French, German and Spanish). It is possible to browse the contents lists of current or past issues of participating bulletins. It is also possible to search for titles using any of the words in the original title. So far, only a few

At present *The Sri Lanka Prescriber* is the only bulletin in the country providing independent drug information and we hope that we will be able to continue publication without financial constraints.



Andrea Tarr

members are providing their contents lists for inclusion in this index. The site needs to include many more members' contents lists to be really useful, so please contact Maria Font to arrange for your bulletin's contents lists to be added. For bulletins that already publish full articles freely on the Internet, a direct link can be created between the contents list on the ISDB site and the articles on the bulletin's website.

### Library

Here, editors can post articles (published in their own bulletin or in other publications) that they feel will be of general interest to ISDB members.

### How to gain access to the members-only area

Access to this part of the website is open to editors from ISDB member bulletins via a password. All you need to do is fill in a form on the website. After submitting the form, you will be sent a password by email.

We want these features of the website to become a really useful resource for ISDB members. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact Maria Font or Andrea Tarr.

# ISDB General Assembly 2005—draft program

## Sunday, 11 September 2005

1500–1800 Registration

## Monday, 12 September 2005

0900–0910 **ISDB business**

Welcome to members

0910–1000 **ISDB business**

Reports from the executive group

1000–1045 **ISDB business**

Reports from the regions

1045–1115 **Morning tea**

1115–1245 **ISDB business**

Constitution: discussion and voting

1245–1345 **Lunch**

1345–1415 **Opening ceremony**

1415–1500 **Communicating with patients: keynote address**

*'The Public Citizen Way'*

Larry Sasich, Deputy Editor, Worst Pills Best Pills, USA

1500–1530 **Afternoon tea**

1530–1645 **Communicating with patients: symposium**

– Experience at Treatment Notes (Sharon Hart, UK)

– Experience at Kusuri-no-Check (Rokuro Hama, Japan)

– Developing a German Model (Walter Thimme, Berlin)

1645–1730 **Communicating with patients: general discussion**

1800–1930 **Launch of ISDB–WHO Manual**

## Tuesday, 13 September 2005

0900–0945 **Quality of bulletins: keynote address**

*'Critical Issues About Design'*

David Whitbread, Graphic Designer, Australia

0945–1030 **Quality of bulletins: general discussion**

Design issues and your bulletin

1030–1100 **Morning tea**

1100–1215 **Quality of bulletins: concurrent workshop**

Localising evidence

**Quality of bulletins: concurrent workshop**

Choosing articles

1215–1245 **Quality of bulletins**

Reports from workshops

1245–1345 **Lunch**

1345–1415 **Quality of bulletins: keynote address**

*'Making Words Work For You'*

Andrew Herxheimer

1415–1530 **Quality of bulletins: concurrent workshop**

Critical appraisal

**Quality of bulletins: concurrent workshop**

Criteria for choosing positive advice

1530–1600 **Afternoon tea**

1600–1630 **Quality of bulletins**

Reports from workshops

1630–1730 **ISDB business**

Election of new committee

1900–2200 **Reception**

**Wednesday, 14 September 2005**

<b>0900–1000</b>	<b>Managing a bulletin: keynote address</b> <i>'Legal Challenges—Lessons From Butletti Groc'</i> Joan-Ramon LaPorte, Barcelona, Spain
<b>1000–1030</b>	<b>Morning tea</b>
<b>1030–1230</b>	<b>Managing a bulletin: symposium</b> Sustainability – Managing on a low budget (Pijus Sarkar, India) – Compensating authors and editors (to be determined) – Supporting bulletins in trouble (Maria Font, Italy)
<b>1230–1330</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>1330–1415</b>	<b>Managing a bulletin: keynote address</b> <i>'Independence—The Why And How'</i> ? Gianni Tognoni, Mario Negri Institute, Italy
<b>1415–1530</b>	<b>Managing a bulletin: symposium</b> Independence – Communicating with industry (Peter Mansfield, Australia) – Relationships with government (John Dowden, Australia) – Relationships with media (Joe Collier, UK)
<b>1530–1600</b>	<b>Afternoon tea</b>
<b>1600–1800</b>	<b>ISDB business</b> Meeting of the new committee (committee only)
<b>1900–2200</b>	<b>Dinner</b>

**Thursday, 15 September 2005**

<b>0900–1000</b>	<b>Bulletins in society: keynote address</b> <i>'Bulletins As Campaigners—Involving Society'</i> Dr Zaeem-ul-Haq, The Network for Consumer Protection in Pakistan, Pakistan	
<b>1000–1030</b>	<b>Morning tea</b>	
<b>1030–1145</b>	<b>Bulletins in medical education: concurrent workshop</b> Pharmacovigilance	<b>Bulletins in medical education: concurrent workshop</b> Filling in the gaps in the evidence
<b>1145–1215</b>	<b>Bulletins in medical education</b> Reports from workshops	
<b>1215–1330</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>1330–1400</b>	<b>Introducing the new committee and office bearers</b>	
<b>1400–1430</b>	<b>Closing ceremony</b>	

<b>Legend:</b>	
Social functions	
ISDB business	