

Conference 98 – a personal view

(with a little help from my friends)

by Tina Ambury

(the one running around with a microphone)

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When Council began planning for the inaugural NANP National Conference, we wondered if having to use the half-term weekend in Norwich would work. By resolving not to draw on membership subscriptions to make Conference financially sound, we had no capital to draw on. We needn't have worried, delegate places were oversubscribed and sponsorship opportunities had sold out by the Summer.

Delegates made the most of the sizeable exhibition area and the rare opportunity to mingle with reps. In fact, the reps were so pleased with the delegates' attention that they packed up early, saying they'd seen everyone - much to the chagrin of many delegates who would have liked more exposure to the products.

Greg Carter (outgoing NANP Secretary and new Principal), opened Conference with an overview of what non-principals (NPs) had achieved in the past year in terms of representation on national GP bodies and what we can feel good about, whilst warning about complacency. As usual, he waved his banana around.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Philip Leech (Principal Medical Officer, NHS Executive and mastermind of Clinical Governance) was eagerly awaited. Some were disappointed by the lack of NP specific points, but the NHS Executive are committed to a fully inclusive policy for primary care and have frequently stressed the importance of non-principals within that policy. Leadership can come from NPs.

The workshops were very well received. Obviously, as a facilitator of one, I couldn't go to them all, but my spies kept me informed about most. Here are their snippets;

The educational toolkit saw Rebecca Viney (Chair of GPC NP subcommittee) sharing her experiences with an overflowing room of non-principals keen to know how to keep up their continuing professional development. She told of creating a non principal GP tutor post, what you can aim to provide, the institutions you can approach and various ways to make a successful self directed learning group. Bitty Muller (West Midlands NP education facilitator) then explained the learning cycle and helped the group identify which kind of learner they were. Activists, pragmatists, and analysis -paralysis were all described. All felt they had a better understanding of their preferred learning style. She also described the many different ways to learn, from groups, through reflection, to exams. Richard Eve (inventor of PUNS and DENS) gave a humorous and irreverent presentation about his creation - a tool to create your own educational portfolio directly from your patients unmet needs. The session finished with lively questions and answers amongst the group, who realised that there is so much more to education than we previously realised.

BMA industrial officer Jeremy Pymer, in what was potentially good workshop, failed to fully achieve his remit. Like Philip Leech, his presentation wasn't quite NP specific. Delegates felt input from a grizzled NP veteran might have helped. It was felt he should have asked what people wanted to find out - how not to get taken for a ride, or how to negotiate better - rather than spend time on irrelevant stuff (e.g. the EC working time directive, or the differences between statutory and non statutory rights).

The two IT workshops were intended, via both informal and formal presentations, to help overcome the barriers most beginners have about computers and the internet. Participants, 50 in total, showed enthusiasm and courage in pursuing a greater understanding of this intimidating subject. The expert facilitators skilfully adapted their presentations to the needs of their audience, within what were severe time restraints and did a sterling job. Their friendly and approachable manner gave individuals the chance for some hands-on experience and one-to-one advice throughout the day. Chris Cooper (of Computer Service Centre, Norfolk) did a great job in providing and setting up the really good equipment including four separate internet lines and Simon Berrisford (Editor of epulse) oversaw on-line access and demonstrations of the epulse web site. Waterstones bookshop provided, amongst a large range of medical and non-medical books, relevant books on IT for the beginner. Much was learned on the day to shape the IT workshops for future conferences! Definitely a success. I think everyone one went away spurred on to buy computers, get on-line and take over the world.

Modesty forbids *my* saying the stress workshop went well - but other people tell me they never thought there'd be *anyone* more manic than me. However, Martin Davies (professional stress facilitator and

mental health trainer) was just that and between us we exhausted our group, making them think a little between bouts of laughter.

Mark Horsey's (Director, Professions and Partnerships Ltd.) "Independent financial advice for NPs" was good, but he assumed a slightly higher level of knowledge than was actually the case and again might have done better by asking what people wanted to know. Despite this, I think his groups went away less naive about their finances.

I went to Amanda Kirkby's (Communications Director of Healthcall and media GP) portfolio workshop – which was the most popular choice – and was amazed at the breadth and depth of knowledge and experience the group encompassed. Delegates were certainly empowered to the idea that they (if not every GP) are portfolio doctors.

Maurice Henchey's (Chief Executive Healthcall) overview of what Healthcall does and what they could help NPs with, provoked much debate in fuzzy time. His vision of continued support for the NANP, both practical and educational, was well received – his suggestion that Healthcall and the NANP might set up a commercial venture was less so. This is obviously an area where members have strong feelings and should rest assured that Council would not enter into such dealings without full and frank consultation with the membership.

Soap Box, as do all such events, brought strong feelings to the fore. Debate ranged from whether the NANP should become involved in cases where NPs faced complaints from patients, to the inevitable name to replace "non-principal". As ever, time ran out before Conference could put the world to rights, though at least delegates had their say. As to a name change, one delegate felt Conference's precious time shouldn't be wasted on such trivia and I'll leave you with another (Principal) delegate's thoughts, *"It's slightly funny that although none of us like the term non-principal I've got so used to it and associate it with such a positive, incredibly successful bunch of people that it has lost its negativity for me"*.

Timing somewhat pressed Paul Jenkins' (Consultant in charge of the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital acute medical admissions unit) run through the ER presentation of asthma, but delegates managed to put off thoughts of bubbly and dinner, to at least try and answer his questions. I can just imagine my working with Anthony Andrews in Chicago – well, maybe not.

Dinner by the way was great, both for food and fuzzy time, all topped off by Phil Hammond (leading candidate for NANP Honorary President) being so funny he had my non-medical husband in tears. I'm sure his speech was full of witty insights, as I remember telling him so afterwards in the bar, but, not having my Palmtop with me, I didn't write any of

them down. Good thing really, as not only would he have made fun of me – did you realise he was busy filing away bits of delegates behaviour for future use? – he'd probably sue me (media tart that he is) for breach of copyright. Never mind, next year I'll wear a disguise and take a dictaphone.

Sunday morning's early start did not put off delegates, who braved the change of rooms admirably to find out how to run a successful NP group – despite Nicki Mantel-Cooper (co-ordinator of West Surrey NP group) and Alyson Lee's (outgoing NANP membership secretary and co-ordinator of the Oxford NP group) stage fright. No doubt their efforts will soon lead to NP groups sprouting throughout the UK – we *shall* rule the world! Those NPs thinking of braving the transition to Principal were treated to an excellent survival guide from Janice Oliver (outgoing NANP treasurer and founder of the Glasgow locum group), Jan Campbell and Kirsty Husk (active members of the Norfolk NP group). All three facilitators have seen practice from both sides of the fence, which no doubt provided their group with a blue-print for future use. I went along to the RCGP workshop, to heckle David Haslam and Mike Knapton (GP tutor and course organiser in Cambridge) and was surprised to find that most of the group *did* bother, in that most were paid-up members of the College. David, as Chairman of the Exam board, probably had an easier time than he had anticipated, but took away NPs views on the College – both good and bad – to report back to Council.

Question Time started deliberately late to allow for more fuzzy time – a popular request. The panel faced fairly tame questions from the floor, though I thought Peter Holden (Chairman, BMA's Professional Fees committee) and Maurice Henchey might come to blows at one point – perhaps I should have put David Haslam between them. I have to admit that my feeling like a rabbit caught in headlights helped cloud my memory of what pearls of wisdom were spoken. Things I do remember, were the panels' attempts at conveying their pro-NP stance – especially Anne-Louise Kinmonth's (Professor of General Practice at Cambridge University) feeling that NPs were such an energised group, unburdened by “baggage” - my disappointment at not finding out exactly what the new pay rates would be and perhaps the most important question raised – by the delegate who felt her needs had not been met by the Conference – what was being done for NP education. The answers to this question – which somewhat reassured the questioner - carried us quite neatly to Richard Fieldhouse's (Chairman, NANP) AGM announcements and closing speech.

He told of how non-principals had been treated as second-class GPs for years - to patients and practice staff alike we have been “just a locum”. His numerous examples of how this impacted on non-

principals, highlighted the strong temptation not to bother with CPD and the development of a siege mentality.

Things are changing, we are slowly becoming enfranchised. Through the NANPs network of information and support, individual grassroots GPs are helping to shape their future. We are making people sit up and take notice. The DoH recognition that "GP" refers to *all* GPs - principals *and* non-principals and full inclusion of non-principals into the processes and structures of PCGs and clinical governance, underlies its commitment to an inclusive policy.

However, Richard warned that before we can become fully enfranchised, we still have some way to go. Equality is still a major issue. The excluding factors of NHS Superannuation, recognition of seniority and devolved clinical responsibility by national registration, continue to place non-principals beyond the pale of mainstream general practice.

Education and its funding remains a sore point, one which must be tackled – for, as Philip Leech said, non-principals cannot opt out of clinical governance.

Before closing, Richard warned that we will all need to make compromises to achieve this. Both as individuals and as an organisation, we need to work more closely with our colleagues, to take on wider responsibilities of patient care.

But, from being a reactive organisation, under Richard's Chairmanship, the NANP has become proactive. This Conference must have left many happy people around the country who no longer feel isolated and out on a limb. Barriers came down extremely fast and there was a real camaraderie. It was great meeting up with everyone, hearing what's been happening and getting advice from others about NP issues.

Conference would not have been such a success if it were not for one man – Peter Harvey. Both by personal effort and great leadership of local and national teams, he somehow managed to change a wobbly plan into a concrete "event". thanks Peter. Modesty will have him tutting but I know he will be a kindly adviser to whoever runs the show next year. All we need now is to build on our successes (and learn from our mistakes), to make next year even better.

See you in 1999!