

EDITORIAL

The BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology: a new training opportunity (BPS Dip Pharmacol)

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The British Pharmacological Society (BPS) is always keen to broaden the appeal of pharmacology and to highlight the benefits the Society has to offer to a wider audience. To this end, new members from all areas of biomedical research are welcomed and, as a reflection of the impact and relevance of pharmacology to many aspects of biomedical research today, many of our newer members include medical graduates or are researchers who have obtained their first degree in subjects such as immunology, or under more global titles such as molecular biology or biomedical sciences. In turn, the Society embraces, and greatly benefits from, the new expertise and knowledge brought to our subject by members coming from these diverse backgrounds.

There is, however, an increasing risk that newer members coming to our subject from areas other than pharmacology lack some of the training in essential aspects of pharmacological knowledge and insight, traditionally taught as part of an undergraduate degree in pharmacology, required for a successful career in pharmacological research. Furthermore, the last few years have witnessed a decline in the number of pharmacology departments in the UK and many of our medical schools no longer teach or examine in the area of pharmacology or clinical pharmacology (see Vallance and Smart, 2006), further contributing to potential knowledge gaps of our future researchers.

The BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology (BPS Dip Pharmacol) has therefore been developed to address the potential shortfalls in pharmacological training of our newer researchers, and as such, is particularly valuable for non-pharmacologists and for young scientists in the drug industry. Importantly, it represents a commitment by the Society of its role in the continuing professional development, medical education and career development of its members, ensuring that pharmacological research is maintained at the highest level in the UK.

The Diploma Steering Committee, under the leadership of Professor Sue Brain (King's College London) was chosen to include non-clinical and clinical pharmacologists from both academia and industry. The committee has put together a comprehensive programme of pharmacological study; successful completion of which allows participants to use BPS Dip Pharmacol as evidence of an advanced training in our subject. The programme of study involves attending core and specialist workshops, dissertation writing and communicating at BPS meetings. These various components of the Diploma programme are run by Society members; the Diploma committee has put together an extensive list of highly qualified clinical and non-clinical course tutors from

both industry and academia covering a wide area of expertise in all areas of basic and applied pharmacology. An additional benefit of the Diploma is that web-based educational material associated with the Diploma is a resource available to all society members.

One of the major decisions in setting up the diploma was the choice of core workshops. The fundamental driving force in pharmacology is to understand and quantitate drug actions; an appreciation of classical bioassay and concentration–response relationships is a basic skill essential for every aspect of pharmacological research. Consequently, the first core workshop to be scheduled has been designed to address specifically this important topic. *General and Advanced Receptor Theory*, organized by Professor Billy Martin (Glasgow), will run on a two yearly basis with the first workshop scheduled for July 2007. Although traditionally the majority of successful drugs are small molecules, interest more recently has also focussed on peptides and proteins; many of the principles underlying the use of biologicals are pharmacological in nature. With these considerations in mind, Dr Mark Christie (UCB Group) has organized a workshop *Drug Discovery and Safety Pharmacology* scheduled for December 2007. Other core workshops include *Pharmacokinetics*, *Translational Pharmacology*, *Molecular Pharmacological Techniques* and *Statistics*. By communicating at BPS meetings and writing an in depth dissertation, participants will benefit from being exposed to new ideas, gain valuable experience in external presentation and other communication techniques and report writing skills.

The BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology is unique in the UK. Not only does it act as a mechanism for continuing and updating education in pharmacology, it provides a range of networking opportunities between and within industry and academia and raises the profile of the Society and of the subject. All of which can only contribute to pharmacology remaining successful in the UK.

Further details about the BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology, how you can apply or how to help can be found on the BPS website (www.bps.ac.uk), or by contacting Dr Judith Hall at jmh@bps.ac.uk. We welcome any comments or feedback.

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References

- Vallance P, Smart TS (2006). The future of pharmacology. *Br J Pharmacol* 147: S304–S307.