

## IN CONVERSATION WITH

# Professor Gerry O'Donoghue, Master of BACO 2020

No BACO-themed issue of ENT & Audiology News is complete without an interrogation of the BACO Master! We sent **Priya Achar** and **Tawakir Kamani** to interview **Professor Gerry O'Donoghue**, Master of BACO 2020, who has lots to tell us about the modern, collaborative, global, environmental and family friendly ethos of the event.



Gerry preparing to bring a little magic to BACO 2020.

Head and Neck Surgery, which is the world's biggest otolaryngology professional group. We negotiated a very special collaboration with them, they welcomed us in New Orleans this year at their annual meeting and we will be welcoming them at BACO 2020. As a result of this very special collaboration, a significant number of US and Canadian professionals will also be coming.

Our international collaboration doesn't stop there; we have of course a great interest in attracting colleagues from all round the world. There are great connections between the UK and the Commonwealth countries in particular, where many have trained in the UK and returned to their countries. We want to invite them back to enjoy BACO, perhaps meet their former trainers and those with whom they have trained, and we want it to be a coming together of all our colleagues who have been associated with British and Irish otolaryngology.

### **We understand that part of your vision is to be inclusive of families. Can you tell us more about that?**

BACO in the past has been a rather staid organisation that didn't really prioritise looking after younger participants and colleagues with young families. So, this year we've introduced a family room so that mums and dads who come to the meeting can go there with their children and have some privacy but, at the same time, be able to participate in BACO. We would like to do more and perhaps future BACOs will do so,

but this is a start at making family friendly arrangements for BACO and helping our younger colleagues to attend and enjoy the meeting.

### **What are your thoughts on the trainees with current austerity measures limiting study budgets?**

That's a very important point as when meetings become too expensive, they become inaccessible for many people. A major priority for the present BACO Executive was to reduce registration costs and I am pleased to say that we have done this quite radically. So, we want people to stay longer at BACO and not just attend for a day or two. We have been particularly sensitive to the trainees whose study leave budgets are very limited so that even after going to BACO 2020, there will still be some money left over for the average trainee. We hope that we have broken the myth that BACO is expensive and unaffordable, which was a legitimate criticism in the past and cannot be levelled against BACO 2020. For our colleagues in lower and middle-income countries, we have bent over backwards to facilitate their attendance because by becoming International Members of ENT UK, they get a special favourable rate.

### **Is there anything else that we are doing to help colleagues in developing countries who might wish to attend BACO 2020?**

I'm delighted to say that BACO 2020,

### **First of all, why BACO 2020?**

BACO is the UK's premier international meeting of otolaryngology, including all related subspecialties and disciplines. Most of us today practise within a subspecialty, but you cannot build a practice within a silo. You must have a much bigger organisation. So BACO brings all our subspecialties together and that's important as when we are together, we are much stronger! I hope that it will be the coming together of the very wide family that is otolaryngology today, and when we do that, we'll be able to show our strength and how vibrant we are as a group.

### **What is your vision for BACO 2020?**

I believe that we practise medicine in a global village, and it is important to be aware of our responsibilities to the wider community outside our own frontiers, outside the NHS in which we work.

One of the first things we did for BACO 2020 was to have a formal collaboration with the American Academy of Otolaryngology

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Gerry with his colleagues turned interviewers, Priya and Tawakir.

along with ENT UK, have introduced 13 fellowships, each offering free registration and free hotel accommodation as well as an honorarium of a few hundred pounds to cover other expenses. This is a very generous offer that we have made this year, which is a significant increase on previous years. We very much hope that trainees in these countries, once they know about it through the website, will apply for these very valuable awards. BACO 2020 would like to welcome as many guests as possible and we are making very tangible moves to achieve that goal.

**Cadaveric dissections are accompanied with a substantial cost. Are you able to provide this for BACO 2020?**

Cadaveric dissection is a very costly undertaking, and many international meetings avoid having dissections of that kind. We've decided to continue with this tradition though, and we will have dissections that will be televised and will also have high-quality didactic teaching from

experts to accompany the dissection. We will also retain clinical skills workstations, perhaps not at the same scale, but they will be of interest to attendees.

**Is BACO 2020 looking to be environmentally friendly?**

This is a very legitimate concern and we intend to embrace this. Major conferences produce a great deal of waste. We hope to 'ban the bottle' by asking delegates to bring their own water containers. We are also going to reduce waste in the amount of paper material we offer. We have an excellent smartphone app with all information relevant to the meeting available on it in real time, so the need for printing large volumes of material will reduce. BACO 2020 will be as environmentally friendly as we can make it.

**What are we doing at BACO to reduce the gender gap in the future in order to move forwards with an increasing female workforce?**

I sincerely hope that BACO 2020 will

be a celebration of the diversity that characterises our specialty. One aspect is closing the gender gap. We are pleased to have 15% of our workforce as women, and this is rising. But female colleagues are generally under-represented at meetings, especially at podium presentations, and we intend to address this at BACO 2020. We will not do this all at once, but we have agreed as a group to reduce 'manels' (man only panels) as much as possible, and to increase the participation of our high-flying female colleagues on the programme, much greater than was the case in the past. We have an explicit policy to make this happen.

**This is a great end to an interview by two female colleagues! Thank you Professor O'Donoghue, we've enjoyed discussing your visions for BACO 2020, and are confident it will be an event not to be missed.**



**INTERVIEWED BY**

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