

Reflections on organising the British Academic Conference in Otorhinolaryngology 2015

BY ANDREW C SWIFT

As the Local Host and Programme Director of BACO 2015, **Andrew Swift** is a pivotal person with local knowledge and contacts. He provides us with some top tips as to how to go about organising a successful conference.

With BACO being a triennial event, it is so easy to be lulled into a false sense of security thinking that there is plenty of time, only to be followed by an inevitable experience that would include a sense of urgency, total panic and “how do I get out of this situation”. However, these unpleasant latter sensations can all be avoided with good forward planning and organisation.

The forward planning starts with the bid to hold the conference. A potential host centre needs to submit a clear, well-organised bid for consideration to the Master and executive committee at ENT UK. This will be followed by a site visit before final decisions are made. The bid should confirm that the proposed conference centre can accommodate the event and that there are suitable venues for the various social events. The main social event is the Master's reception: the chosen location needs to be able to accommodate about 1000 guests and to be within reasonable distance the main conference centre and hotel accommodation.

In constructing the bid, it is also very helpful to consider the local team who will be responsible for organising the various components of the event. This is to some extent dependent on the location and the people who will want to be involved. There should be one clear local leader, who then needs to seek support. From experience, a large local team is not necessary, but it is advisable



The ACC Conference Centre, Liverpool.

to seek interest from those who may wish to be involved at an early stage so that friends and colleagues do not feel excluded. Once the bid has been won, it is very important for the local organiser to engender a good working relationship with the key people at the conference centre and the social programme venues at an early stage of the proceedings.

There are key factors that need to be in place at an early stage for organisation of a successful conference. These include the appointment of people willing to take on various responsibilities as well as a decision on how the conference will be managed and organised. Over the last nine

years I have had personal experience of running the conference ‘in-house’, seeing the risks and consequences of this model when it goes awry, and contracting a professional conference organiser for the whole event. The latter model may be seen as expensive but does have the advantage of assuring that things run smoothly and the risks of serious untoward events are minimised. Anne Haylock and her team have done a fantastic job of organising things behind the scenes and we now have aspects such as a highly professional functional website and electronic registration that is both simple to use and effective. However, this has to be finely balanced by being inclusive of our own in-house office staff at ENT UK and ensuring that everyone feels that they have a part to play.

It is not that long since various committees determined the organisation of BACO, but this did lead to a considerable amount of repetition

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Inside the ACC Conference Centre, Liverpool.

and time spent in meetings. For 2015 this has been greatly simplified to key individuals and the model seems to have worked very well so far. The Master plays an important pivotal role in guiding the key direction of the conference and the 2015 Master, Ian Mackay, has been brilliant at providing very wise advice on all aspects of the conference along the way. Professor Shak Saeed is the Academic Chair and has organised a fantastic full programme that was greatly assisted by an academic committee based on each of the various specialist society groups. We will also be able to have on-site interactive cadaveric dissection during the conference. This has only been possible because of the really helpful positive support from the Department of Anatomy at the University of Liverpool and the willingness of the senior staff at the conference centre to help make this happen, from an early stage in the proceedings.

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One important hint for the organisation of future BACO conferences is to always have an assistant for certain key roles or to have a pair of colleagues working together. Shak has been greatly assisted by Peter Andrews who has also organised a superb electronic poster section from over a thousand submissions. Chris Potter

has done a great job as Assistant Honorary Treasurer, helping me to keep an effective budget and to balance the large amounts of money that can flow easily from our accounts. Professor Nirmal Kumar and Tim Woolford have put together an amazing clinical skills centre with a great team of tutors. There are so many other people who have worked tirelessly to create such a fantastic event; I apologise for not mentioning them all by name but acknowledge that BACO is one big team effort and I would like to say thank you to you all.

Attracting sponsorship from the trade is a crucial part of a successful conference and Janet Mills has again done a brilliant job of this, particularly in light of the current economic climate. In planning this component of the conference it is important to consider the needs of the trade exhibitors: they really value having good quality space that is also close to the circulation of delegates within the conference venue. One successful formula is to include other activities within the exhibition space: for 2015 we have included the clinical skills centre, an electronic poster display and several lunch and refreshment stations. The latter is highly important as queuing is minimised, service is effective and each station can offer a different menu, ensuring that delegates will enjoy their lunch and then interact with the exhibitors.

BACO is the main postgraduate event for our specialty and the secret of success is time and commitment from a team of like-minded willing people. The rewards that this brings in terms of friendship and companionship are well worth all the effort and are to be strongly recommended to any aspiring volunteers in future years.



St George's Hall, Liverpool. Venue for the Master's reception.



Andrew C Swift,
Local Host and Programme Director – BACO 2015,
Consultant ENT Surgeon and
Rhinologist, Honorary Senior Lecturer,
Aintree University Hospital, Liverpool, UK.
E: andrew_swift123@yahoo.co.uk

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