

ACB Council November 2005

What's Wrong With Reference Intervals?

Everything, it seems. Dr Julian Barth was invited to make a presentation to Council on this topic. He talked about complex patient pathways, who will be using laboratory reports and the different perspectives of those involved. "Am I normal?" asks the patient. "Is my diagnosis correct?" asks the physician. Dr Barth had attended a recent meeting of the IFCC Committee on Reference Intervals and Decision Limits, a committee with the acronym RIDL. Following his presentation, Council appreciated the problems, and agreed that the whole subject was obviously a great big RIDL. Prof Ian Young, Chair of the ACB Scientific Committee, had suggested that an ACB working group be set up to tackle some specific problems. Council has asked Dr Barth to do so, in liaison with the Scientific Committee.

Pathology Review

Ms Janet Smith announced that the review is to be led by Lord Carter of Coles, with Prof Price (as an independent expert on lab medicine) and Marcus Robinson (Accenture Government Services) to sit on the Review Team. The ACB is satisfied that there are no preconceptions in this Review Team and, as an Association, we should support it. Dr Ian Watson will lead a taskforce which will seek the views of ACB Members and work with the ACB Corporate Members, under BIVDA, to produce a response to the Review Team. Lord Carter will be invited to meet with ACB Executive.

Association Awards

As mentioned in the last Council report, the National Members, Dr Ceridwen Coulson, Dr Ian Godber and Dr Brian Senior, were asked to look at the feasibility and / or desirability of Regional Awards. They reported to Council that they felt the creation of a new "Regional Award" would not work effectively. Their favoured option was to incorporate the regional award into the Fellowship Award. Council agreed to accept the proposals. From 2006, new guidelines will apply and will appear in the next Handbook. The criteria are:

Fellow

Nominations can be put forward for individuals who have retired over the past 3 years, or are known to be retiring in the next 12 months. These nominated individuals must have achieved one or more of the following:

- Continually led and instigated changes to meet the needs of clinical biochemistry services on behalf of a region or nationally*
- Developed exceptional educational and/or training facilities for the profession*
- Led in setting up and developing over a considerable period of time, a well-respected and valued specialised service that had a major impact either within a region or nationally*
- Raised the profile of the profession over many years, within the lay community, either regionally or nationally*

Honorary Member

Distinguished, international contribution to Clinical Biochemistry

Emeritus Member

Exceptional contribution to objects of the ACB

Government Officer

Whenever there are changes in the Department of Health regarding, *inter alia*, pathology services, the ACB is not always consulted, and it is often difficult to obtain relevant information. Such problems could be overcome by the creation of an ACB Government Officer post, the incumbent of which would actively undertake PR and information gathering. Council agreed in principle with the proposal that such a post should be established. Further work in setting up the post needs to be performed.

Education Committee

There is still “trouble at t’ mill” with the Northgate electronic application system for Trainee Clinical Scientists. Dr David Cassidy, Chair of the Education Committee, has written to Thames Valley SHA, the holders of the contract with Northgate, questioning on what basis Thames Valley could give a vote of confidence in Northgate. He has not yet had a reply. He will be pursuing the matter further with Prof Sue Hill, the Chief Scientific Officer.

Still with trainees – why are so few men applying? Dr Stephanie Barber, Chair of the Trainees’ Committee, said the Committee thought that perhaps (e.g.) chemistry graduates and careers promotions should be targeted in an effort to redress the imbalance. The South West & Wessex Region had looked into this in great detail. There is no doubt in their minds that the reason for the overwhelming preponderance of female applications to Grade “A” posts is the pink application form!

Succession Planning

The Chairs of the Scientific Committee and Education Committee are due to demit office soon. Dr Cassidy has agreed to continue for a further term as Chair of the Education Committee. The next Chair of the Scientific Committee will be Dr Denis O’Reilly. Ms Smith thanked Prof Ian Young for all his work on the Scientific Committee.

Workforce Advisory Committee

Mr John Kane, Chair of the WAC, tabled a graph showing the bimodal age distribution of Clinical Biochemists. There is a distinct “dip in the middle” i.e. a lack of numbers in post in the age range 35 – 45. Over the next few years there will be a large number of the more “senior” Members retiring. Who will take their posts? It is, however, encouraging to see the numbers of younger (trainee) Members in post.

Other Items

A number of other items were discussed, including the ACB Code of Conduct complaints procedure, SfH, NOS, KSF, HPC, FCS (including A4C), CPS, FHCS, ACS and the RCPATH. Translations and further information to follow.

Steve Goodall, Assistant Secretary