

Editorial: Spinal education, training and research in the UK

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The British Association of Spine Surgeons (BASS) with over 350 members is the largest spinal society in the UK, following the amalgamation with the British Cervical Spine Society in 2009. Many of the members are also members of the British Scoliosis Society (BSS) and The Society for Back Pain Research (SBPR). The Society has grown not only in numbers but also in stature, and actively promotes the study of spinal disorders with particular attention to the surgical treatment of spinal disease and disorders. The web site (<http://www.spinesurgeons.ac.uk/>) is now well developed and for patients offers advice on back pain and a number of the common spinal complaints; and for members promotes educational activities, has recommended reading on topical issues and has a forum for discussion. Our annual meetings are increasingly well attended with an accompanying increase in the number of submitted abstracts, and hence an overall increase in the quality of submissions. High quality research is dependent on the production of good data. One of our focuses in recent years is the development of a National Registry to be made available on line for our members to enable the collection of patient data. It will enable the prospective

evaluation of existing and new treatments, devices and materials at single or multiple sites and the easier organisation and co-ordination of multicentre randomised trials. The data produced could enable surgeons and industry to work together for mutual benefit, as well as providing invaluable information for the National Health Service, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and most importantly for the benefit of patients. Hopefully it will raise the standing of the surgical treatments for back pain to a level of evidence base that will satisfy everyone involved in back pain management.

The UK must have the most frequently “reformed” and re-organised health care system in the world resulting in many new and poorly defined government bodies with which we have to engage. In addition, we have three spinal societies and to bring them together as one voice, we have set up a body the United Kingdom Spine Societies Board (UKSSB), for the three societies not only to organise the combined bi-annual Britspine meetings but also to act as the conduit to EuroSpine, Government, industry and other bodies.

By publishing the abstracts of Britspine 2012 in the European Spine Journal, we hope this will represent an important step in forging closer links between the UK Spine Societies and the Spine Society of Europe. The papers in this special edition of the journal show the spectrum of good quality research currently being produced. We hope that as we progress with our development, that in time this will not only be maintained but also significantly improved upon.

Generations of spine surgeons come and go. The current generation of UK Spine Surgeons face significant challenges with growing political opposition to procedures with limited scientific evidence and reduced NHS budgets. This makes it even more important that the current generation

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be remembered for both significant achievements in good quality research and political reform. This can only be achieved by Spinal Consultants who are prepared to commit their own time and work as a team to achieve these

important goals to the long-term benefit of patients with spine problems.

Conflict of interest None.