



Organising a Regional Meeting

The initial proposal

Suggestions for meetings are encouraged from the Specialty Advisory Committees, any Member or Fellow of the College and from non-members. The idea for a symposium, workshop, or other meeting may have come initially from you or to you from a Specialty Advisory Committee.

If you would like the College to take full responsibility for the organisation and financial handling, then the meeting will be taken on by the Conferences and Academic Activities department which will include our standard rate of registration fees at the time of the event. You will need to refer to the 'College Symposia Guidelines' document also found on the meetings section of the College website – www.rcpath.org/conferences.

If you would prefer to organise the event yourself or within your Trust, then the symposium should be self-financing. The points below will guide you in the right direction to organising a professional event.

Title

The title of the symposium is very important. An organiser should not feel the need to be an advertising executive, but to make the meeting successful, it is essential to attract a good audience. The focus of a symposium should be clear from the programme. Brevity in titles works best. A subtitle can amplify a broad banner title when necessary.

An audience will be less interested by an advertisement for a symposium called:

'Parasitic, protozoal and other transmitted diseases presenting in the UK but acquired in other countries'

than by

'Update on Soft Tissue Tumours'

Speakers

The number of speakers is the decision of the organiser. About eight is normal for a one-day symposium. When more than eight speakers are invited, they may have insufficient time to develop their themes and the audience may not have time for questions.

It is possible and desirable to ask one of the afternoon speakers to act as the chairman for the morning session and vice versa.

Timing of presentations

Presenters are usually asked to speak for 20-45 minutes, followed by 5-10 minutes for questions with short introductions from people chairing the symposia and a short summing up at the end. A separate discussion session could also be incorporated into the programme.

Outgoings

Identifying the costs of holding a meeting include:

- Room hire booking and charge;
- Advertising;
- Catering costs for participants (variable depending on requirements);
- Audio Visual equipment and hire of projectionist
- Travel and accommodation expenses for speakers and chairmen.

Income

The registration fee can be worked out after an initial costing has been completed. After paying for catering etc, the income may not meet the outgoings but sponsorship can be included in your income if it has been confirmed.

Overseas speakers are welcomed, but there are obvious difficulties with costs. It might be possible to invite overseas speakers who are attending another meeting in this country to participate in your meeting. Some companies, especially in the USA, pay for their employees' travel and accommodation when they are invited to speak at College meetings. This should not inhibit requests to those companies for sponsorship to contribute to the general costs of the meeting.

The role of the College

Before arranging a regional meeting, it is important that the organiser understands the role that the College plays.

The Conferences and Academic Activities department will provide:

- Advice on suitable presenters
- Advertising of the event

The role of the organiser

Your tasks are not as daunting as you may think. You should

- Verbally contact possible speakers;
- Forward the programme to the Conferences and Academic Activities department at the earliest stage;
- Arrange and book the venue;
- Arrange and order the catering;
- Register the delegates on the day of the meeting.

Sponsorship

Securing sponsors for a meeting is challenging. It is a fact of modern commercial life that companies expect to be asked for charitable donations and put tax-exempt money aside specifically for that purpose. The College can benefit in ways other than financial, by our Members bringing to the attention of commerce the important part pathologists play in research and teaching. There are many companies who would wish to be seen to be associated with the College's good causes if only they were given the opportunity. Potential sponsors should be approached at an early stage. They may wish to distribute advertising material at a meeting, provide folders bearing their logo, and have a stand at which their products can be demonstrated, or simply be thanked for their contribution by one of the chairmen or the organiser. They should be acknowledged on the final programme.

Advice should be sought from the College Campaign Director as to companies which should not be approached for sponsorship for meeting?

Venue facilities

When planning a regional meeting, the size of the venue you require must be taken into account, as well as audio-visual equipment and disabled access. You may have to hire outside caterers to provide tea, coffee and lunch and it's worth remembering that you must have room to serve the delegates if there is no on-site catering.

Audio-visual facilities

Wherever you hold your regional meeting it is vital that you gain knowledge of the audio-visual (AV) equipment available to your speakers: this should include slide carousels, dual projection, laptop facilities (PowerPoint presentation software) and overhead projectors. Do not leave this to the last minute. It is also important that there is a qualified AV technician available for the whole meeting and, if not, one must be hired.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Educational events can generate 1 CPD credit per hour excluding breaks. To ensure that your event qualifies for CPD approval, you will need to send a copy of the programme and a completed CPD application form to the College's CPD department. The form and further information is available at www.rcpath.org/cpd

A CPD certificate can be distributed to all delegates either on the day of the event or afterwards. A template can be sent on request from the CPD department.

Evaluation

To help the Standing Committee on Conferences and Academic Activities assess and improve delivery, evaluation forms are distributed at every meeting. The number of attendees is just one indication of the success of a meeting but it's only one aspect. The College wants to know for example: How many people attended? What they gained from a meeting? What could have made it better? What they thought of individual speakers? Was the catering acceptable?

Organisers will have ideas on how to audit their meetings and are asked to contribute to the content of the evaluation questionnaires. These will be dealt with in a very positive way and are always welcomed. An evaluation template can be sent to the organiser on request from the College.

On the day of the event

It is important to ensure that all delegates sign a register on the day of the event. A template register can be sent on request. This is for two reasons: (1) Health & Safety - , as the organiser, you will need to know who is actually in your conference in the case of an emergency and (2) for CPD certificate purposes, although you may prefer to send out CPD certificates after the event to all registered delegates.

We hope these guidelines give you a better understanding of all the responsibilities surrounding the organisation of a conference. If you would like any further information please contact Michelle Merrett, Events Manager on Tel: 020-7451 6740 or email michelle.merrett@rcpath.org