



Professor John Croall
Bulletin Editor

What's around the corner?

One of the things that sometimes keeps you sane and sometimes drives you nuts is the sheer unpredictability of our jobs. You never know what a patient is going to say, what the next phone call will bring, what surprises will be found at an autopsy, lab bench or authorisation queue.

Sure, most days are routine – a GP phones me and asks how to treat a patient sick with *C. difficile*. Ten minutes later another GP does the same. Then an FR. Maybe I should put my frequently given advice into a voicemail message: “press ‘1’ for MRSA; press ‘2’ for treatment of *C. difficile*; press ‘3’ if you really want to annoy me by asking something basic you should have been taught in medical school but weren’t.” But one recent Friday afternoon (it’s always Friday afternoons for this sort of thing) I got a call from a paediatric consultant – he’d just seen two very sick children with what he thought was measles. Measles! Really? Yes, really. One had Koplik’s spots. Turns out they were part of a fairly large, evolving outbreak. And it also appeared that there were measles outbreaks all over the UK at the time. We had to vaccinate (with MMR) susceptible front-line staff fast. Well I’m not going to launch into a tutorial on measles here. Just accept that measles is back, big time. I think most of us had better get reacquainted with how this particular morbillivirus affects our diverse specialties.

This editor job can have its moments too. One of the recent events that caused some outrage was a request to advertise in the *Bulletin* a service for online histopathology reporting. Now as you can see if you flip through this issue, we don’t get many requests for adverts, but we would normally be happy to accept them and get the income that comes with them. But this case riled the relevant Specialty Advisory Committee and a conflict of interest was mooted – would the College be seen as giving implicit support or backing for such a service if we ran the advert? Or would we be seen as dispassionately taking the money and running? If you have any views on the matter then please write to me and we will restart the debate.

Another thing that I’ve done recently is write a new consultant job description to help fill the vacancy about to be left by my colleague who is leaving for better things (he hopes) in Bolton. I’ve never done this before so I was very grateful for the supportive material including detailed model job descriptions that are available on the College’s website: www.rcpath.org/index.asp?PageID=741

This helped a lot – and proves that the College website is indeed a fantastic resource. As the President says in his report (page 244), he is surprised how rarely some members access the website. Or the Electronic Workforce Database for that matter. Now with revalidation in development and with the College taking a role alongside the General Medical Council (GMC) in this, it is obviously important that your GMC details can be matched to your College record. Now, you know what happens if you let your address go out of date with the GMC? You get struck off, no questions asked. This doesn’t go down well with your employer or your patients or your bank manager. So I think we owe it to ourselves to check that our College record is correct – before any problems based on misidentification arise.

Outreach and National Pathology Week

One of the biggest challenges for the College is how we can represent pathology to key stakeholders – the press, politicians, other doctors, and last but not least, the public. Most non-pathologists think we all do forensic medicine *CSI*-style. How can we change their view? Should we even try? Outreach is hard, demanding and needs proper resourcing. A recent College visit to the Science Museum in London revealed the time and effort they put in to spreading the word about science. I think pathology needs the same approach, and no one else is going to do it for us. How else do we attract people into the profession? How will we be involved in high-level decisions?

Well that’s why we are holding National Pathology Week isn’t it? Events across the country should spread the message of who we are and what we do and why. What are you planning?



National Pathology Week
3–9 November 2008

Professor John Croall
and his apple-green
Brompton



On your bike

Finally, in light of Britain's fantastic cycling results in the Olympics, I'd like to recommend to colleagues a clever little scheme that the Government has launched and many employers, including the NHS, have signed up to. It's the Cycle2Work scheme. In essence your employer buys you the bike of your choice and you pay it up over 18 months from your gross salary – effectively reducing the cost by 25–40% depending on your tax band. You undertake that at least half of the bike's use is for cycling to work. My Trust supports the scheme so I took the plunge and am now the proud owner of an apple-green* Brompton folding bicycle. Fun to ride, and goes free on trains which allows me to cycle/train commute to work and get fit and lose weight at the same time. The bike is neatly folded under my desk as I type. OK, I know I am highly unlikely to be spotted for the Olympic team for 2012 but it sure beats getting stressed out in the car on the M56.

By the time you get this it will only be a few weeks away. It's not long to go now so we'd all better get cracking. Please see the new dedicated website www.nationalpathologyweek.org for more information.

* That's paint not birefringence!

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