Editorial

The BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology: a training opportunity for clinical pharmacologists

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Keywords

Diploma, workshops, dissertation, BPS Diploma, professional development, continuing education, clinical pharmacology, CPT, therapeutics

Abstract

Coinciding with its 75th anniversary, the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) has launched a Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology (BPS Dip Pharmacol). This award is open to clinical and non-clinical scientists and those in related occupations. The Diploma is designed to appeal to those who want to further their pharmacological knowledge or gain an appreciation of basic and clinical aspects of the subject through participation in an advanced programme of non-clinical and clinical pharmacological study. The Diploma is unique in the UK. It provides not only a mechanism for continuing and updating education in basic pharmacology, clinical pharmacology, and therapeutics, but also a range of networking opportunities for non-clinical and clinical scientists in industry and academia.

Since its formation in 1931, the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) has welcomed contributions to its affairs and publications for its journals from both basic and clinical pharmacologists. In view of the strong contributions from our clinical members, a separate clinical section of the Society was formed in 1970 and the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology in 1974.

Clinical membership of the BPS remains healthy. At the end of March 2006, for example, there were 705 members of the Clinical Pharmacology Section (CPS), of whom, encouragingly, 196 were postgraduate or undergraduate Associate Members. Despite this, there is cause for concern over the future of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics (CPT) in the UK: a recent survey showed that there were only 68 specialists practising CPT in the UK [1], and clinical pharmacology was identified by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) as one of the critical shortage areas in

industry. Within academia and industry there is emerging evidence of gaps in pharmacological knowledge of some of our newer clinical and non-clinical researchers; many of whom now come to our subject from areas other than pharmacology.

These problems have arisen, at least in part, from the loss of opportunities for teaching and research in pharmacology and CPT in the UK. In the last few years there has been a trend towards closing pharmacology departments in the UK and many UK medical schools no longer teach or examine in the area of pharmacology or clinical pharmacology and therapeutics [1, 2]. Many of our newer workers come to pharmacology with first degrees in more global subjects, such as molecular biology or biomedical sciences. The decline in the number of students studying pharmacology and of the gaps in the pharmacological knowledge and insight of our future researchers and practitioners is an inevitable result.

The BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology (BPS Dip Pharmacol) has therefore been developed to address these potential shortfalls in pharmacological training. The Diploma is particularly valuable for young doctors or CPT practitioners, non-pharmacologists, and young scientists in pharmaceutical companies. Successful completion of the Diploma will allow participants to use BPS Dip Pharmacol as evidence of advanced training in the subject. We also hope that the Diploma will act as a mechanism to increase the profile of pharmacology and clinical pharmacology, including its relevance to medicine and science as a whole, in the UK.

The programme

The Diploma Steering Committee is headed by Professor Susan Brain (King's College, London). The committee members, who include non-clinical and clinical pharmacologists from both academia and industry, have developed a comprehensive programme that involves core and specialist workshops, dissertation writing, and communicating at meetings of the BPS. The various components of the Diploma programme are run by highly qualified clinical and non-clinical course tutors from both industry and academia, covering an extensive range of expertise in all areas of basic and applied pharmacology and CPT.

One of the first challenges for the Diploma committee was to design core workshops that would be relevant to both clinical and non-clinical practitioners, not too daunting a task given that pharmacology is an integrated subject and that any division between basic and clinical pharmacology is arbitrary.

Quantification of drug actions requires an appreciation of classical bioassay and concentration–response relations and is a basic skill essential for a clear understanding of all aspects of pharmacological research. The workshop *General and Advanced Receptor Theory*, organized by Professor Billy Martin (Glasgow), will run every two years, the first workshop being scheduled for July 2007.

Recent interest has focussed on peptides and proteins, as well as small molecules, as potential drugs, and many of the principles underlying the use of biologicals are

pharmacological in nature. Dr Mark Christie's workshop *Drug Discovery and Safety Pharmacology*, scheduled for December 2007, has been designed to address these matters.

Experimental medicine and translational research are of particular topical interest to clinically minded pharmacologists, and in view of this the workshop *Translational Pharmacology* has been planned for Autumn 2008. Other workshops include *Molecular Pharmacological Techniques*; *Statistics*; and *Pharmacokinetics*. The last of these is particularly relevant to the new challenges, particularly drug distribution, that gene therapy will bring.

The BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology is a unique training opportunity that will provide a mechanism for advancing and updating pharmacological education. By communicating at BPS meetings and writing an in-depth dissertation, participants will benefit from being exposed to new ideas and will gain valuable experience in external presentation and other communication techniques and skills in writing reports. The Diploma will open up a range of networking opportunities for clinical and non-clinical workers in industry and academia and thereby serve to promote collaboration within biomedical research as a whole.

Importantly, the establishment of the BPS Dip Pharmacol represents a commitment by the Society to its role in the continuing professional development, medical education, and career progression of its members. By increasing the profile of pharmacology and therapeutics it will ensure that pharmacological research and practise is maintained at the highest level in the UK.

Further details about the BPS Diploma in Advanced Pharmacology, how you can apply, or how to help can be found on the BPS website (www.bps.ac.uk) or by contacting Dr Judith Hall at jmh@bps.ac.uk. We welcome comments and feedback.

References

- 1 Maxwell SRJ, Webb DJ. Clinical pharmacology – too young to die? *Lancet* 2006; 367: 799–800.
- 2 Vallance P, Stone TS. The future of pharmacology. *Br J Pharmacol* 2006; 147: S304–S307.