

BSMM News

Spring 2003



BSMM Annual Meeting, Manchester 2003



Shown above (l to r) are Austin Burt, Cleve Kurtzman, Neil Gow, David Hawksworth and Richard Summerbell who took part in the debate that opened this year's meeting



BSMM President Frank Odds presents Derek Sullivan with the BSMM Award, after Derek's lecture entitled "The epidemiology and virulence of *Candida dubliniensis*"



Sandy Johnson (left), after delivering the Foundation Lecture on "Molecular and cell biology of mating in *Candida albicans*"

Photos courtesy of Frank Odds

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Risks, restraints, rules and the realities of life

Not so long ago our Government — or was it just the Prime Minister? — came up with the bright idea of dealing with antisocial behaviour on the streets by means of a law that permitted the police to march miscreants to the nearest cash machine to pay on-the-spot fines. The idea was scrapped as unworkable, but I mention it because it is such a dazzling example of the way our society tends to react to problems by passing new laws and implementing new constraints on our behaviour.

It could be argued that the main role of government is to fine-tune legislation to remove every possible unfairness, inequality and risk from our lives. At the level of crashes involving public transport, this means that causes are tracked down and procedures implemented to prevent recurrence. When a doctor serially bumps off hundreds of his patients, it means that a new bureaucracy is set up to monitor death rates per GP to pick up another Harold Shipman in the making. When people wish to sing or play music in premises open to the public, it means that local councils enforce a law requiring a paid licence for the activity.

After the sing-song at this year's BSMM meeting, a colleague asked me, not entirely in jest, if the War Museum North had obtained a music licence for us to undertake this activity. Our Government, represented by Culture Minister Kim Howells, is seeking to replace the archaic Public Entertainments Licensing legislation with a new bill that puts the annual BSMM sing-song into a position where we may find ourselves silenced by a hotel, hall or other venue that has not complied with the new Music Licence red tape.

The old law was daft enough. It stipulated that a licence is required for premises selling alcohol where more than two people perform music. That's why you seldom see trios, quartets or larger groups of musicians playing in pubs where music is an occasional, rather than a regular activity. The new law does away with the "two-in-a-bar" rule but instead of liberalizing things it makes them worse by extending the licence requirement to "any place". The intention — apart from that of raising revenue — is to reduce antisocial behaviour. Yes, that's right, our sing-songs could be so construed since any form of live music requires a licence.

The march of progress via constraining legislation already had an impact on our professional lives as mycologists. One example concerns laboratory safety. In the wake of two instances in the 1970s where people died of smallpox contracted by the virus's escaping from inadequately contained laboratories, our present system of microbial hazard containment came urgently into being. During the last 30 years there has been increasing harmonization of regulations regarding the handling of "infectious" microbes in laboratories. We now have four "containment" categories, defined by the Government's Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) according to the severity of the infections they cause and the availability of successful treatment, not by the actual risk of a laboratory worker contracting the diseases.

At containment levels 3 and 4, these categories seem reasonable. Fungi at level 3 all have a documented history of causing laboratory-acquired infections, some of them fatal. However, most of us working with fungal pathogens in the UK handle *Candida* spp., *Aspergillus* spp., *Cryptococcus neoformans* and dermatophytes. To those of us with knowledge and experience of these fungi the risk to personnel is probably perceived as minor, and slightly different for each of these types. For example, one should worry about the risk of inhalation of *Aspergillus* conidia in the laboratory by someone who may have a respiratory allergy, while inhalation of a *Candida* species or a dermatophyte is both unlikely and not a known hazard anyway.

Our knowledge and experience count for nothing, however, nor does the absence in the literature of case reports of mycoses due to Group 2 fungi acquired in the laboratory. The law requires us to implement the ever-burgeoning requirements for work at Containment Level 2, and our institutions expect us to comply with the law to protect themselves against costly legal actions. The ACDP continues to add more species to the list and to extend the rules for protective clothing, work surface specifications and containment requirements for waste disposal for Hazard Group 2 organisms. Ultimately, the endless addition of new requirements reaches a point where we feel sensible precautions have gone further than they need, and we lose respect for the rules.

As more and more legislation in our professional and personal lives generates increasing paperwork and bureaucracy (and ever more “managers” to oversee it) we might stop to reflect: how much real improvement can be measured as a consequence? Have we minimized the risk of air crashes by introducing standardized maintenance and flying procedures? Do we have better health care thanks to the many elaborate and expensive procedures in place to avoid medical mistakes and malpractice? Did we previously have a serious risk of laboratory-acquired *C. tropicalis* infections that has now been taken away? Is life improved by having official procedures to regulate and licence a group of people singing songs round a piano? The answer to some of these questions is undoubtedly “yes”; for others the benefits are less obvious. When rules don’t reduce real-life risks, or solve real-life problems, shouldn’t there be a mechanism to relax or remove them?

Frank Odds

Federation of Infection Societies November 19-21st, 2003 Cardiff

This year’s meeting of the Federation of Infection Societies (FIS) will take place in Cardiff from November 19th-21st. This is the 10th Anniversary meeting of FIS and the first time that the meeting has been held in Cardiff.

Available as part of the meeting is the British Infection Society / Janssen-Cilag Travel Bursary. This is awarded to the best oral or poster presentation to enable the recipient to attend and/or present at an international meeting that has a significant mycological content. It can also be used for travel as part of a project on a mycological topic. The value of the award is £600. Further information on the meeting can be obtained from the FIS website at www.fisconferences.com

BSMM Annual Meeting, Bradford 2004

In 2004 the BSMM Annual Scientific Meeting will be in Bradford. Bradford is a large (and, unusually for UK cities) still growing city with a long history. The city now has it’s own unique flavour, with the remains of successive waves of immigration leaving their mark (for example, German film makers came to ‘Little Germany’ for it’s interwar Germanic atmosphere). The textile industry has come and is going. For those interested in more modern art, the Hockney Gallery at Salt’s Mill is worth a visit (I prefer the restaurant and the Titus Salt’s Mill complex). For Bronte addicts you can even buy a Lawnmower at Haworth’s ‘Bronte Lawnmower Centre’. The local cuisine (?) is excellent and Yorkshire beer is renowned.

The meeting will be based at the University, which is near the centre of the city. Access is easy from the Railway Stations. Those from further afield can travel easily in from Leeds-Bradford Airport. For the impecunious, there will be accommodation in the University, and for the fat cats there are Hotels very close by. The meeting will return to the Monday (full day) /Tuesday (half day) format, with plans for the dinner to be in the Photographic Museum. On Sunday evening we will have a curry.

The Symposium will have a theme of Host-Fungus Interaction. There will be plenty of ‘space’ for free papers, but I hope the meeting will interest both clinicians who’ve noticed all therapeutic trials are basically the same (better than the last one?), and those who have noticed that fungi interact with something other than primers (microarrays?).

Me? I’m an infectious diseases physician at Bradford Royal Infirmary. I have a long interest in invasive fungal infections (I blame Chris Kibbler), which since coming to Bradford has moved away from what most would see as immunocompromised patients to the more complex invasive disease that is characteristic of OiB (only in Bradford). Otherwise, there are the nice people in Leeds (Ruth, Richard & Dick). And finally, if you fall ill you can be reassured that the Infirmary is a Three Star Hospital.

Paul McWhinney

NOTICEBOARD

BSMM Subscriptions

At the Annual General Meeting in Manchester, it was decided to increase the annual subscription from £10 to £20 with effect from January 1st, 2004. All members who pay by standing order will be receiving a new form to complete. Members who currently pay by cheque or credit card are also requested to consider paying by standing order as it reduces the cost and time to the Society to collect the subscription. Standing order forms can be obtained from the Treasurer.

BSMM Meetings Secretary

Elaine Bignell has become the new Meetings Secretary for the BSMM. Elaine is a Post Doctoral Fellow in Ken Haynes's group at Imperial College, London, where she works on virulence of *Aspergillus* species.

BSMM Membership List

Enclosed with this issue of the Newsletter is the latest issue of the membership list. For the first time, email addresses, phone and fax numbers are included for those members who have contributed them. If your details have changed, please let the Secretary know (h.r.ashbee@leeds.ac.uk) and they will be updated before the final printed version of the list is produced.

BSMM Travel Grants

BSMM Travel grants are awarded three times each year. The forthcoming deadlines for submission of applications this year are 15th June and 15th October. Application forms are available from the BSMM website (www.bsmm.org).

Forthcoming meetings

The Role of Diet, Fungi and Probiotics in Allergic Disease

This meeting will take place on Wednesday 30th April at 76 Portland Place, London. Further information can be obtained from the Allergy Research foundation, PO Box 18, Aylesbury, HP22 4XJ. Tel/Fax: 01296 655818

International Society for Human and Animal Mycology (ISHAM)

The 50th Anniversary meeting of the ISHAM will take place between May 25-30th in San Antonio, Texas. The meeting will include sessions on fungal taxonomy, genome sequencing, innate immunity, epidemiology of fungal infections, veterinary mycology, endemic mycoses, fungal biofilms, mycologic signalling, antifungal drug resistance and fungal vaccines. Further information can be obtained on the ISHAM website (www.isham.org).

Contributions for the next issue of the Newsletter should be submitted to the General Secretary (Ruth Ashbee, e-mail h.r.ashbee@leeds.ac.uk) by 15th June 2003.

BSMM Spring 2003 Newsletter compiled by Ruth Ashbee (h.r.ashbee@leeds.ac.uk)