

# THE BIG QUESTION

THIS MONTH WE ASK

“Do scientific conferences still have a role in learning and CPD?”

The first Committee  
(elected by postcard ballot)

R Muir (Edinburgh)  
RB Sutton (London)  
FA Izzard (Cambridge)  
WA Mitchell (Cambridge)  
E Wheel (Oxford)  
W Manby (Manchester)  
A Norman (Liverpool)



## Nicky Milner

Acting Deputy Head of Allied Health  
Anglia Ruskin University

Yes, absolutely, and not just because I am an academic! Scientific conferences continue to play a vital role in advancing our knowledge across subject areas such as biomedical science. In addition to disseminating research findings, they provide personal and professional development opportunities for networking and sharing good practice, for staff working across all stages of their career. There are very few occasions where colleagues from across the profession have the opportunity to socialise and conferences are designed for this purpose.

Twenty years ago, as a trainee biomedical scientist, I attended my first scientific conference. Even though I did not present a poster or present at the conference, I kept a record of the interesting topics that I learnt about, such as modern diagnostic techniques and globally important infectious diseases. I have maintained professional connections made through networking at subsequent conferences. Reflecting back through my conference history, I realise how this was a transformative educational experience – particularly around building confidence with communicating scientific information to the wider audience.

Social media is widely used to promote conference highlights, for example, Twitter hashtags are used to create a story of events and allow engagement when not attending. This is a quick and easy way to contribute to discussions and it is likely that you will gain followers, thereby building your digital network.



## Rajvinder Dhillon

Biomedical Scientist and Colposcopist  
Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS  
Foundation Trust

I believe scientific conferences are of excellent value to biomedical scientists. Exposure to the clinical research of a speciality is interesting to learn, and also helps broaden the career horizon for scientists.

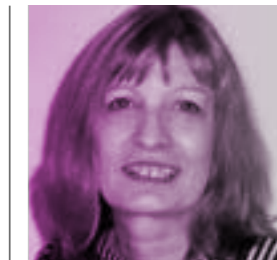
I attended my first scientific conference in 2001, whilst I was studying part-time for my biomedical science degree.

The conference was in California, and I was out there visiting my sister. I noticed the poster in the hospital she worked in advertising a cervical cancer conference where lunch was provided (I love a buffet). I entered the conference as a cyto screener and second-year biomedical science student, and left it feeling inspired enough to want to become a colposcopist. The lunch was a bit disappointing though.

CPD through journal-based learning limits the subject, however attendance at conference can enable one to tailor CPD reflections to a specific area of pathology.

I have since attended many scientific conferences, both as a speaker and a delegate. Conferences take pathology outside the laboratory, and enable scientists to critique audits and studies that are presented.

The general face of the NHS will always be front-line doctors and nurses, however, seeing the application of point-of-care testing, and advances in molecular diagnostics serve to remind us of the pivotal role biomedical scientists have in today's healthcare.



## Sally Barratt

Senior Biomedical Scientist  
Cellular Pathology Department,  
Leighton Hospital

The cost of attending scientific conferences can be outside the training budget, but a good way of getting around this is to get involved. This can be a learning exercise in itself. Encouraging junior staff to present posters or short talks is satisfying when they come away energised.

I am responsible for equipment, so my first port of call is the trade show. This is a good chance to update my knowledge for any upcoming procurement items. As a training officer, I always found the pamphlets useful for tutorials and reflective learning on alternative technologies. The latest textbooks are on display so I can have a browse at what would be useful for teaching.

Management and training talks have guided me where new regulations have baffled the way forward. Different opinions have broadened my approach and questioned my thinking. The chance to discuss with other delegates and exchange contact details gives an opportunity for follow up.

I usually have specific talks that I am especially interested in, which address a current work issue. If I have any specific technical problems I tackle appropriate speakers over the coffee break and have found myself saving countless hours in method development thanks to their expert knowledge.

Before attending I ask my colleagues if they have anything they want to know, and I pass on what I have learnt by giving a presentation over lunch afterwards.