

President's Report – 5th Annual Business Meeting – BSEC

27/5/2010

A very pleasant afternoon to you all! When our Society was launched into existence on May 19, 2006, I proposed that our Executive should aim to achieve three objectives:

1. A facilitating function that would see us adding new members to our Society, facilitating dialogue about bioethical issues, and facilitating the setting up of research ethics committees to serve the territories within the Caribbean;
2. An advocacy function that would see us advocating the formulating of ethical policies in health care and research in countries across the Caribbean; and
3. Moulding a form of “Think-Tank” from our membership to provide opinions on bioethical matters

Well I am pleased to report that all these aims have been accomplished under my tenure. We had a founding membership of a little over 40 persons, and – this year – we have more than doubled that amount – with membership in over 12 Caribbean countries.

Our members have taken part in the formation of, and are serving on research ethics committees, and we have provided template manuals for establishing Research Ethics Committees across the Caribbean to all Chief Medical Officers in the English-speaking Caribbean, which have included Guidelines for the Contents of Research Protocols. We initially provided communication on bioethical issues via email to members, and then via our interactive website - which also has a discussion network for visitors as well as a private forum for BSEC members.

Another objective of our Society was to promote research and publication of ethics-based information, and this has been accomplished through the holding of four (4) annual Bioethics Forums so far, and the publication of three (3) Bioethics Newsletters, produced annually since 2007.

In furtherance of its Mission Statement, BSEC also developed several regional and international links with various agencies and organizations that work in Bioethics, including the Bioethics Unit of the University of Miami, the Bioethics Unit of the Pan American Health Organization, REDBIOETICA-UNESCO, and the European Commission's SINAPSE. We have international links also through our six (6) Honorary Members – which include world-renown Philosopher-Bioethicist – Prof. Ruth Macklin, Professor of Bioethics, Epidemiology, and Population Health at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, and Past-President of the International Association of Bioethics. The outstanding Physician-Philosopher- Prof. Carl Elliott, Professor of Paediatrics & Bioethics at the Center for Bioethics at the University of Minnesota. Prof.

Fernando Lolas-Stepke, who is the Director of the Bioethics Unit for the Pan American Health Organization, Prof. Kenneth Goodman, who is the Director of the Bioethics Unit at the University of Miami – which is one of the Ethics Collaboration Centres for the World Health Organization. Prof. Andres Peralto-Cornielle, who is Professor of Bioethics at Cibao Technology University in the Dominican Republic, a Member of the Board of FLACEIS as well as REDBIOETICA-UNESCO, and who is currently also serving a 4-year appointment on UNESCO’s International Bioethics Committee. Our 6th Honorary member is Prof. Daniel Piedra Herrera – who is the Executive Secretary of the Cuban National Bioethics Committee.

Through the work of our website coordinator, Mr. Christopher Muir, our website also provides a number of “links of interest” to other institutions, organizations, and sites related to Bioethics.

In my inaugural speech at the launch of BSEC in 2006, I had also stated the aim of facilitating the setting up of health care ethics committees. To this end, a template for establishing such committees was designed and circulated to members of the BSEC Executive for their input and discussion, and copies of that template are provided here today.

Our members have also been involved in establishing a National Bioethics Committee in Jamaica, and are currently working to establish a similar committee in Trinidad & Tobago. Further, in an effort to maintain contact with our members and regularly update them, I have been writing quarterly communications where I inform them of happenings since my last communication, as well as things to come.

Shortly after that very successful Bioethics Forum last year in Trinidad & Tobago, entitled “Bioethics Standards: People and the Environment” - we applied to the Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom for an award to assist with our hosting of this year’s Bioethics Forum here in Guyana. That Grant has helped to offset a large part of the costs associated with our Forum today and tomorrow. In this, I must single out our BSEC Regional Representative here in Guyana, Ms. Merle Mendonca, for her outstanding and indefatigable collaborative work done throughout the past year as we prepared for this Forum.

Planning for our next BSEC Forum should begin soon, and the new Executive to be elected here today will announce the venue for that forum in due course.

As I now complete my tenure as your President over the past 4 years, time does not permit me thanking all persons who contributed greatly to our accomplishments over the past four years – but I must single out firstly – my greatest support along this very fruitful journey - Prof. Ralph Robinson. It was Ralph who – in late 2005, I

gave the initial template I had written for the BSEC Constitution and asked to steer a committee of 6 persons, whose work culminating in the formation and launch of BSEC in May 2006. A couple of our founding members serving on that steering team were – our outstanding legal mind, Dr. Eileen Boxill, Queens Counsel, and Dr. Anthony Mullings, who is currently serving as the Chairman of the National Bioethics Committee of Jamaica. Also serving on that committee was our Vice-President – Prof. Cheryl Macpherson, who is unavoidably absent today, and Dr. Donald Simeon, our Treasurer who has given us such dedicated service over the past 4 years. Our Executive meetings over the past 4 years have been held around his job-visits to Jamaica, and he and I are further bonded by the Constitution – we both will be stepping down from our posts today. I thank him sincerely for his reliability and diligent work over the years. My sincere thanks also to other members of our outgoing Executive, Vice-President Cheryl Macpherson – for her support and stellar work on our annual Bioethics Newsletter – *Bioethics Caribe*, Secretary Shereen Dawkins-Cox – for the high quality of her work despite the presence of baby Appiah in her life, Regional Rep. Eileen Boxill – who hosted all our Executive meetings this past year despite the extremely heavy workload she carries in her substantive job, Regional Rep. Tony Frankson who was always present at our Executive meetings with so many ideas and suggestions – first in person, then when his job was transferred to the UWI in the Bahamas – he would do a telephone conference call to participate. Nuff respect – Tony. I must also commend South-East and South Regional Reps. Paul Ricketts and Merle Mendonca - who – while unable to attend our Executive meetings in Jamaica in person, Paul – like Tony – telephoned in to take part, and Merle was always quick to respond and make suggestions by email. Their ideas and suggestions were invaluable. It was a great team to work with, and I thank you all for your outstanding support in this endeavour.

Finally, I would like to thank you - our members for your support of our work throughout the years. It was a great honour and privilege serving you all and spreading the cause of Bioethics across the Caribbean. And I know we will all pledge our continued support to the new Executive that will be elected here today.

Best wishes to you all!

Derrick Aarons – BSEC President 2006-‘2010