

President's Report – Annual Business Meeting – BSEC

5/5/07

With our Society being fully 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

We have achieved a significant part of these objectives during this our first year of existence. In regards to facilitating, we have gained several new members, moving from our 40 founding members to a current total on register of over 67 members, including some that found out about us through their visiting our website. We have provided a description of the field of Bioethics on our application forms, provided communication on bioethical issues initially via email, and now our website is facilitating our dialoguing about bioethical issues. We have facilitated the updating of members by initially circulating details of upcoming bioethics events by email, and now such information is to be found at our website. We have also recommended members for sponsorship to attend a Bioethics Conference.

In regards to facilitating the setting up of research ethics committees, our Vice-President, Prof. Cheryl Macpherson, working out of Grenada, is currently spearheading our initiative to use some of our BSEC members as resource persons to provide research ethics expertise for countries in the eastern Caribbean. Further, I have compiled a list of our members based on the special areas of their expertise, to provide specific guidance or opinions on any bioethical matter that warrants our input.

The abovementioned targets were in keeping with our Society's mission to increase knowledge and understanding by fostering deliberations about bioethical issues across the English-speaking Caribbean. The establishment of our Society's website by Mr. Christopher Muir, our website coordinator, has gone a far way in achieving this aim, as the website has two Forums – a public forum for visitors to read and learn from articles about bioethics posted there, and a private forum for our members, where our members may enter the chatroom and engage in discussions about any bioethical topic of their choosing.

Another objective of our Society is being achieved with the hosting of our Bioethics Forum today, as our Constitution states that we should promote research and publication to provide ethics-based information for practicing professionals as well as the general public, and so the text and proceedings from today's Forum was recorded and will be made available not only to our members who were unable to be here today, but also will be posted at our website for the general public to access. The proceedings will be included in the first edition of our Society's Newsletter, which is called "Bioethics Caribe – A Caribbean Society", and is to be edited by our Vice-President, Prof. Cheryl Macpherson.

We have had a number of activities throughout the past year. Our activities began with a public relations effort to get our name and mission known across the Caribbean. To sensitize the public in this regard, a Press Release written by Virgen Advertising in Jamaica, who had agreed before our launch to do this public relations work, was circulated to all media houses in Jamaica, and then to all our BSEC members across the Caribbean, requesting that they also seek to get it printed in the various media within their countries. Virgen Advertising also sent their release to one of our founding members, Mr. Desmond Allen, one of the Managing Editors of the Jamaica Observer newspaper. It resulted in an article that was printed on July 24, 2006 in the Jamaica Observer, entitled "A Bioethics Society at last", with a subtitle – "Caribbean body to spearhead information on often controversial issues".

This newspaper article resulted in our Secretary Prof. Ralph Robinson and myself being interviewed on Tuesday morning July 25, 2006 on KLAS-FM by Attorney-at-Law Mr. Lincoln Robinson, myself the next morning on HOT 102's Nationwide by Mrs. Beverly Anderson Manley and Miss Emily Crooks, and Ralph and myself on Radio Jamaica by Mrs. Dionne Jackson Miller on Wednesday evening Aug. 16. The newspaper article was also picked up and printed in the Guyana Chronicle on Wednesday July 26, and our Treasurer, Dr. Donald Simeon, got the Press Release by Virgen Advertising printed in the Trinidad newspaper on August 16. The Sun newspaper in the Turks & Caicos Islands also published the article in their edition July 28-Aug.4, 2006.

I have also written profiles on BSEC, which were published in the Caribbean Health Research Council Newsletter, the Newsletter of the Medical Alumni of the University of the West Indies, and the Casebook of the Medical Protection Society of the United Kingdom, for its Caribbean Edition. I also promoted our Society in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in August 2006, when I addressed the 11th World Congress on Public Health as a member of PAHO's team to the conference, providing details on bioethics in Jamaica.

In June last year, five of our members – our Secretary, Prof. Ralph Robinson, our Treasurer – Dr. Donald Simeon, two of our founding members – Dr. Anthony Mullings from Jamaica and Mrs. Sylvia Conway from

Guyana, as well as myself – were sponsored by UNESCO to attend the first UNESCO Caribbean Bioethics Conference hosted in Trinidad. I was asked to present a paper on the current state of Bioethics in Jamaica, Sylvia presented a paper on the current state of Bioethics in Guyana, and our Secretary Ralph presented on the recently formed Bioethics Society of the English-speaking Caribbean. We also took the occasion in Trinidad to hold our first BSEC Executive meeting on June 9, 2006.

Our second Executive Meeting was held on July 19, 2006, hosted in the Zoology Library of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. On August 30, 2006, our Society had its first Annual Business Meeting, which was hosted in the Department of Life Sciences, Mona, Jamaica. Today, therefore, we are in fact conducting our 2nd Annual Business Meeting. We had further Executive Meetings in February and April of this year, both hosted by our Secretary in the Zoology Library of the UWI, Mona.

Our BSEC work will continue over the next 2 months with two activities. I have been invited by the European Commission to attend the Conference “Ethics, Research & Globalization” to be held in Brussels, Belgium, May 13-15, with my name and organization being – Derrick Aarons, President – The Bioethics Society of the English-speaking Caribbean. Further, in June, some members of our Executive will meet with experts from UNESCO and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in the United Kingdom, who will be visiting Jamaica to discuss the establishing of a National Bioethics Committee. These experts wish to begin this work in Jamaica in the first instance.

In closing, I would like to thank most heartily – the hard-working members of our Executive: Prof. Ralph – who has carried the major work of planning and preparing for our various meetings and effecting correspondences, Treasurer Donald - around whose CHRC travels from Trinidad to Jamaica that we plan our Executive meetings, Regional Reps. Tony and Eileen who are always present at our Executive meetings despite their extremely heavy workloads elsewhere, and Vice-President Cheryl, and Eastern and Southern Regional Reps. Paul and Merle who are always quick to respond and make suggestions by email, even though they have been unable to travel to our Executive meetings in Jamaica.

Finally, I thank our members for their support of our work throughout the year, and invite all persons in our audience today who have not yet signed up for membership – to contact Secretary Ralph right after this meeting to do so. Please remember to simultaneously register at our website so that you may have electronic access to our private members’ Forum. Thank you very much.