

What do companies want from wound care meetings?

We are now escaping from winter and with the arrival of spring there comes the return of the conference season. In a few weeks time the Tissue Viability Society will host its annual meeting in Torquay, and I hope that as many readers of this journal as possible will be able to attend this event. The conference will, as always, be supported by a large commercial exhibition but maybe it is time to ask what the purpose of such exhibitions is? You may feel that is a rather unnecessary question – for the purpose is surely to sell product. But ask any exhibitor and in moments of quiet reflection they will admit that there is no clear method for them to assess the success of spending days on an exhibition stand.

Rarely do companies sell directly at an exhibition, particularly when they deal with items such as beds and mattresses. Often the success of an event is measured in the number of leads taken – how many delegates stopped and gave their names and contact details so that a representative can make contact at a later date. But how many of these contacts come to fruition? So if the reason for attendance is not really to sell product what else could it be? Perhaps the reason for attendance is to make contact with key opinion leaders? But surely that is a role primarily for local representatives? There is often an unexpressed view that if a company does not attend a major exhibition then they are somehow in 'trouble' and rumours may spread that they are going out of business (or at least out of wound care)! If it is hard to see a true business case for attendance at exhibitions then how can organisations such as the Tissue Viability Society expect companies to continue attending a growing number of events at an escalating total cost to the company?

There would appear to be an urgent need for the wound care community and its commercial partners to debate how the relationship can be a true mutualism. For without such debate there will surely come a time when there are no longer enough funds to help support the many faces of wound care in the UK. This is not to say that the wound care commercial sector should have control over, or even strongly influence, the programmes of conferences or the

sorts of issues wound care organisations tackle. Independence must be maintained for the benefit of all – if the 'voice' of wound care is seen as the mouth-piece of industry then organisations such as the Department of Health and other official bodies will have every reason not to listen. How should a debate with industry proceed? This is probably a matter where the wound care organisations should work together and the first shoots of collaborations are already sprouting following an informal meeting between several wound care groups last year during the Wounds 2003 conference.

Just as the wound care organisations need to come together to set a new agenda for relationships with the commercial sector so should the companies. The discussion needs to move beyond relationships with single, or small groups of companies and groups such as the Tissue Viability Society need to talk with representatives of the industry as a whole. This would appear to bring trade organisations such as the British Health Trades Association (BHTA) and its constituent industry groups firmly into the picture. Let us begin these discussions now so that we can safeguard the future input from industry and ensure that the industry gains clear benefits from supporting wound care events.

News just reaching the Editorial Office is that Professor John Scales died recently. This will be sad news to many in the Tissue Viability Society for Professor Scales was a leading figure in the development of tissue viability in the UK. Perhaps best remembered for his development of the low air loss bed, he was also a co-editor of *Bedsore Biomechanics*, the proceedings of the first major meeting on pressure ulcers in the UK. An obituary will appear in a subsequent issue of the *Journal of Tissue Viability* and perhaps it is now time for this journal to try and bring the long out-of-print text of *Bedsore Biomechanics* back into circulation? Perhaps if we achieve this; then readers would be surprised just how little has changed, and how slowly we have advanced since that meeting back in 1975?

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