Behind the scenes of JAC: the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy

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This brief article describes the relationship between the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy (BSAC) and JAC, and how JAC has directly and indirectly facilitated delivery of the BSAC’s charitable objectives over the past 40 years.

Background and context

The British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy (BSAC) was established in 1971 to facilitate the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in the field of antimicrobial chemotherapy, an aim that has remained unchanged for over 45 years. Driven by the enthusiasm, energies and determination of founder members, JAC was first published in 1975, providing a primary vehicle for the BSAC to meet its charitable objectives.

The Journal and Society have continued to grow in stature over the past 40 years. The academic and financial success of JAC, due in part to the energy of its current publisher, Oxford University Press, has supported the BSAC in its development into the influential learned body that it is today. The Society is widely respected for its contributions to health policy, professional practice, research and education, and improving patient outcomes nationally and internationally.

The relationship between Society and Journal

The relationship between the Society and its Journal is a healthy and respectful one, supported by necessary and effective governance through its elected Council and the authority it delegates to the Publications Committee (Table 1). The Editor-in-Chief is an ex officio member of both BSAC Executive Committee and Council; senior officers and staff serve on the Publications Committee and a Supplements Sub-Committee comprises representatives from JAC, BSAC and Oxford University Press.

There is a necessary, but healthy, tension between the BSAC, which wholly owns the Journal, and JAC, since the Journal has full rights to editorial independence and operation. The Editor-in-Chief is entirely free to choose to accept articles emanating from the BSAC governing body, its Sub-Committees and members only if they fit the remit of the Journal. The Society rightly does not, and should not, exert undue influence over the content or editorial direction of JAC.

Relationships with others

There are currently 7 Senior Editors and 39 Editors, who collectively handled 2130 articles last year, resulting in 535 published articles. The Society is able to call on their collective wisdom in a number of ways, such as inviting Editors to speak at BSAC meetings or act as referees for grant applications. There is also a much wider pool of approximately 1600 referees annually on whom the Society can call. Similarly, the Journal has access to the BSAC members when seeking expertise. Lastly, there is the valuable relationship enjoyed with the JAC team at Oxford University Press, a not-for-profit publisher that advises and guides the Society through the complex publishing and journal subscriber landscape.

It is an opportune time to express BSAC’s gratitude to the individuals involved, without whose considerable efforts neither the Journal nor the Society would be viable.

Relationships with commercial others

The Journal is renowned within the academic, clinical, scientific, governmental public health and policy and pharmaceutical communities alike. Pharmaceutical companies have contracted with the Journal on a commercial footing over the past four decades to produce stand-alone supplements that inform and promote their products and devices, but at all times ensuring that the publications maintain independence and scientific rigour through a robust peer review process. BSAC has benefited not only financially, but also academically, from the commercial opportunities afforded. Commercial supplements have declined in recent years, due in part to decreases in the antibiotic development pipeline. However, the Society still benefits from this legacy and has continued to work with partners in the pharmaceutical industry through commercial and unrestricted educational grants to promote high-profile activities and initiatives such as the Resistance Surveillance Programme, now in its 16th year, and, most recently, the Massive Open Online Course on Antimicrobial Stewardship, which has attracted over 17 000 registered learners and prospective learners since its launch in September 2015.

Most recently, and demonstrating the collaborative relationship between all parties, the Society and Journal have promoted narrative in relation to public and media engagement, particularly around antimicrobial resistance. Educational supplements can, and do still, appear in JAC, but also elsewhere, such as the supplement secured via Media Planet with the Independent newspaper to mark Antibiotic Awareness week 2015, with a legacy of a...
The role that JAC has indirectly played in ensuring BSAC can meet its charitable objectives so robustly is undisputed. There is, however, a risk in the Society being overly reliant on income generated by the Journal, particularly as the publishing landscape is changing, with some adoption of the models of open access at the point of publication/author pays to publish. In 2014 Council took steps to mitigate against this risk and charged the Honorary Treasurer to work with the Officers and the Secretariat to diversify income streams and reduce reliance on income from the Journal. What appeared a daunting task at the outset has enabled the Society to engage in ways never before envisaged and we are proud to report that BSAC was the first not-for-profit body of its kind to be accepted as a partner on an EU Innovative Medicines Initiative project—DRIVE-AB, a multi-disciplinary, pan-European project looking for new economic models for antibiotic development. BSAC is also working under a grant from the British High Commission and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to develop a blueprint for antimicrobial stewardship training in India in what was the first health project ever funded from the FCO Science and Innovation Fund, reported on in the supplement published with The Independent newspaper.3

Table 1. BSAC Council and Publications Committee structures

BSAC Council
Membership comprises:
Officers of the Society, nominated by Members of BSAC and elected by Council:
• President
• Vice President
• General Secretary
• Honorary Treasurer
• Grants Secretary
• Meetings Secretary
• Officer for Stewardship and Surveillance

Publications Committee
Membership comprises:
President (Chair)
General Secretary
Honorary Treasurer
Editor-in-Chief
Chief Executive Officer
Editorial Manager
Senior Staff Editor
Journal Manager—Oxford University Press
Journal Subscriptions and Promotions—Oxford University Press

Table 2. BSAC Secretariat

Tracey Guise, Chief Executive Officer
Abi Jenkins, Pharmacist and Guideline Development/Project Officer
Felicity Drummond, Grants and Project Manager
Esme Carruthers, Events Manager (maternity leave)
Emily Davies (maternity cover), Events Administrator
Debbie Foster, Finance, Facilities and Membership
Victoria Wells, Science Communications Officer

Opportunities afforded
JAC has been published under contract by Oxford University Press since 1997, an arrangement that is market-tested and tendered at regular intervals. This arrangement has benefited the Society considerably as the Journal generates a surplus that forms part of the BSAC general fund and allows the Society to support and furnish a wide range of activities across the breadth of antimicrobial chemotherapy. Increasingly, these activities reflect the healthcare professionals who now belong to the Society as membership now extends beyond microbiologists, scientists and infectious disease physicians and includes pharmacists, nurses, surgeons, intensivists, physicians and veterinarians, to name but a few. The Society has a policy of providing support for appropriate activities from general funds, with a 3 year limit on underwriting costs. Thereafter, initiatives are expected to become self-supporting from funds obtained from other sources. This enables the Society to refresh and expand its activities—strategically, reactively and proactively.

The value of this policy is evident from the portfolio of activities that BSAC is now able to support, which includes, but is not limited to, an active research programme that has provided over £4.1 million of research funding since 1999, national programmes to measure antibiotic resistance and antibiotic prescribing, support for UK and European susceptibility testing methodologies, international mentorship, and support and education for the implementation of antibiotic stewardship programmes. Through Antibiotic Action the Society has an internationally acknowledged public engagement programme, and closer to home the initiative successfully championed the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Antibiotics, to which BSAC serves as secretariat. The Society has a long-standing reputation for developing good-quality and pragmatic evidence-based guidelines, sometimes with other professional groups, thereby promoting wider cross-speciality and -disciplinary engagement, and has appointed internal resources to support this activity. The BSAC has also recognized the need to implement core practice more effectively within the real-world healthcare setting. Led by one of the past presidents, Professor Peter Davey, the Society is at the forefront of embracing the use of improvement and social sciences in the context of antimicrobial resistance.

Last, but not least, the general funds are used to support the BSAC Secretariat, who work under the direction of Council to deliver the activities outlined, as well as the Journal staff and running costs of the Journal itself (Table 2).
In closing

The BSAC and JAC have worked separately, but synergistically, for over four decades, and will continue to do so. The business model for academic journals might be under pressure, under threat and subject to as yet partly unknown challenges and change. What is clear, however, is that JAC will remain a flagship BSAC activity long into the future, and BSAC and JAC will continue to work together towards an ultimate common purpose—improving healthcare and outcomes for patients across the globe. As Helen Keller (27 June 1880–1 June 1968), an American author, political activist and lecturer, said, ‘Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much’.

Transparency declarations

T. G. is CEO of BSAC and D. N. is current BSAC President.

References