achievement in having promoted the return to learning of the medical profession. The leaders of organised medicine may congratulate themselves at having fended off consumerist and demagogic outcries for recertification and other government controls; and the drug companies would rather pay for education than for calendars and doctor's bags. There is, in addition, in these days of economic stagnation, the prospect of creating many new jobs for professionals, administrators, and clerks—who will do nothing in particular but do it very well. And undoubtedly before long other professions such as lawyers, pharmacists, plumbers, watchmakers, and legislators should join in the learning stampede and develop their own continuing

education programmes, complete with categories, hours, criteria, credits, and self-evaluation feedback mechanisms.

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How to do it

Organise an international medical meeting

III: Registration and its problems

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Registration is central to the organisation of any conference and, along with the budget, forms the framework around which the conference is constructed and the timetable devised. It is an exercise in production management, a straight line along which a vast array of details, events, and people have to be programmed. The design of a system of registration is an excellent opportunity for any organising committee to think their project through to the end and, as such, is worth not a little calm and careful thought.

First stages

Ideally preparation for a large international conference should start two years before the event, and throughout this paper the timing of the various stages of preparation will be given in the number of months away from the opening date.

ORGANISING SECRETARY

A large conference requires an organising secretary who needs a permanent office and staff. On a two-year time scale, the organising secretary should ideally be engaged at 24 months, and certainly by the 18-month mark at the very latest. He is in charge of the conference secretariat, in sole charge of registration, and responsible to the local organising committee chairman and to him alone. The organising secretary services all local

organising committee meetings and liaises closely with the chairmen of all subcommittees. He must be kept informed on all aspects of the conference. Policy is decided by the local organising committee and executed by the organising secretary and committee members. Minutes must be kept, listing the duties assigned to the committee members concerned. The organising secretary does not have a vote at committee meetings.

Communication of the conference's requirements to the "outside world" is the most important single function of the organising secretary and, in this respect, we cannot emphasise sufficiently the value of paying a personal visit to everyone whose services will be needed to make the meeting a success. This is especially so with lay people on the committee. In the early days, time will be available for this purpose and it will ease the path towards the final stages when more and more has to be done by telephone. The secretariat will need its own headed paper and telephone number.

The secretarial duties described here assume that the organisation of accommodation—whether in hotels or in university halls of residence—and the allocation of tour tickets are the responsibility of a travel agent, in which case the secretariat need hold only a record of delegates' requirements.

THE OFFICE

The conference office should be as near as possible to the site of the conference. In the closing few weeks there is an infinite variety of reasons why it is convenient to be near the scene of the final preparations. The office must be large enough to house at least small meetings—say, six people attending—and to store various consignments of conference literature.

THE STAFF

A personal secretary who has knowledge of a foreign language is a boon, especially when multilingual delegates are expected. All outgoing correspondence, however, may safely be conducted

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in English. At nine months an assistant should be engaged on a morning-only basis to deal with book-keeping and registration records, and at three months a part-time typist should join the ranks of the secretariat. Efficient and interested staff are the greatest asset to this kind of project. It is astonishing how many details of those attending can be absorbed by interested staff and by the time the conference actually takes place you have a hard core of registration personnel with considerable background knowledge.

ACCOMMODATION

Having estimated the number of people likely to attend your conference, you must next reserve the accommodation required for the actual meeting in the form of lecture theatres, reception, exhibition halls, temporary offices, and committee rooms. Rooms in hotels and university halls of residence are the remit of the appointed travel agent. Accommodation requirements can often be met by drawing on the resources of your local university, hospital, or municipal offices. Do bear in mind that their facilities are often booked years in advance and that you must act quickly. (See also VIPs and invited speakers.)

PUBLICITY

Progress along the line of conference preparation will be annotated by what you choose to make known of yourselves and at what time. Not uncommonly conference committees produce written information in three stages: the preliminary circular at 18 months; the preliminary programme at 12 months; and the final programme to be collected by delegates on registration. The preliminary circular, in our experience, is unnecessary, since it includes nothing which cannot be contained in a fuller and more satisfying form in the preliminary programme (and it causes unnecessary expense and effort).

Announcements could be placed at 18 months in the relevant professional journals, and newsletters and a mailing list kept at the secretariat of those wanting further details. As a general note on publicity, do not overlook the usual human capacity to misread and misinterpret information, which will be aggravated when not all the recipients speak English as their first language. Instructions must therefore be brief and clear. The problems and expense associated with providing translation facilities are dealt with later in this article and it may well be that, as a committee, you decide against providing this service. None the less, it is worth while to produce information on your social programme at the preliminary programme stage in both French and Spanish.

DISTRIBUTION

International societies tend to distribute their publications by way of chapter secretaries, to whom circulars and programmes are sent in bulk. Make quite sure that you have the correct name and address of the person concerned and that they send you notification of receipt. Busy professional people have more to do than write letters, so send them a receipt which they or their secretaries may simply sign and return. If these receipts are not forthcoming within three weeks of dispatch, make inquiries. The chapter secretary, if left undisturbed, may very well make no contact with the local organising committee until it is much too late.

OFFICIAL CARRIER

An official carrier should be appointed. In return for a free advertisement in conference publications and representation on your registration area, an airline, usually local, will often provide complimentary tickets for use by committee members on conference business and possibly some of your VIPs, as

well as free transport of those bulk packages to your various chapter secretaries. Several airlines will approach you in the early stages of setting up your conference. Whichever one you select should state in writing what benefits they offer as official carriers and what they expect in return. Do not forget that these are details which will have to make printing deadlines.

The Preliminary Programme

The preliminary programme is a major statement of intent: it states who is meeting, when, where, why, and how. The following are details which it must contain:

(a)—*Official languages*. These are often English, French, and Spanish. By "official" is meant that a paper may be presented in any of the languages mentioned. Nevertheless, it does not guarantee that simultaneous translation facilities will be provided.

(b)—*Scientific programme*. A provisional timetable and list of subjects must be provided along with an application form for contributions. Some important decisions must now be taken, for example,

- what is the deadline for contributions;
- are abstracts of papers to be available during the conference;
- what is the time allotted to each speaker;
- if there are both symposia and short paper sessions, do you

process the papers differently?

If both symposia and short paper sessions are to be held, then a book of abstracts is prepared of the latter. Preparing the book of abstracts is made much easier by designing an application form to go with a paper, the bottom half of which should give the author's name and address and a 250-word abstract of the paper. These half papers can then be reproduced by photolithography and bound into pocket-size books.

The vexed question of translation keeps cropping up. In practice, the "simultaneous" translators prefer to have a preview of the paper to be presented. It is impossible to receive all the full texts in advance—even for symposia papers only about half of the texts requested are usually received. In these circumstances, translators often have to work from no preparation other than a look at some of the other papers on the same topic. Obviously for short papers the only preparation material available are the relevant abstracts.

You will almost certainly have to limit translation facilities. The choice lies between keeping the translators together in one lecture theatre or in using their services in different locations during plenary sessions or symposia.

At 24 months you must produce a list of VIPs. Registrations should be checked against this list at regular intervals and VIP documentation marked accordingly. First-class accommodation is earmarked for all VIPs and here, a dire word of warning. As a committee, you will have made these reservations; as a committee you will be liable to pay for it if the accommodation is not claimed. Make quite sure, therefore, that your VIPs know of your arrangements and that they let you know their firm intentions, in writing, by two months at the very latest.

(c) *Categories of membership*. These usually fall into three groups: full members, who may take part in all proceedings of the conference, scientific, technical, and social; associate members, who are introduced by full members, may take part in scientific and technical parts of the conference, and in the social events if space and numbers permit; family members, who accompany full and associate members, may take part in social events only.

(d) *Registration and payment of fees*. In the preliminary programme the cost of the various categories of membership should be stated and a penalty date, six months from the conference, on which fees are increased by an amount agreed by the local organising committee. The necessary registration form, a printed envelope, and instructions that payment should be made by bank transfer to the Organising Secretary of the Conference should also be enclosed.

(e) *Cancellation of registration.* The local organising committee should agree a sliding scale of refund and set the dates on which they apply.

(f) *Reservation of accommodation.* Details of how to apply for accommodation along with a brief description of the various categories available and an approximate price should be stated in full. Make it clear that no reservations of accommodation will be made until the registration fee has been paid. Since accommodation is to be arranged by an official conference travel agent, then it is wise to state that the secretariat cannot undertake to make hotel or student residence reservations. Requests for accommodation will inevitably be made to the secretariat, but these must simply be acknowledged and passed on to the travel agent.

The Preliminary Programme must also contain the following invaluable information: names and addresses of official conference travel agents, carrier, and bank; officers of the Society concerned, including chapter secretaries; local committee members and address of secretariat office; full details of the social programme—however trying it may be to have these particulars arranged one year in advance. Social events include the opening ceremony, trade exhibition, cocktail party receptions, the banquet, and tours of the city and local countryside. (Details of the social programme will be given in our sixth article.)

Registration form (A4)

(For office use only)	Reg No
Important. Before completing this form, read carefully the instructions on Page x of the preliminary programme.	
<i>Full membership</i>	
Surname.....	Initials.....
Title (Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss).....	Country.....
Mailing Address	
.....	
<i>Family members</i>	
(1)	
(2)	
(3)	
(4)	
<i>Associate members</i>	
Surname.....	Initials
Title.....	Country.....
Mailing Address	
.....	
<i>Registration fees</i>	
☐ Full members @ £A (£A + £B if registering after	=
☐ Family members @ £C.....	=
☐ Associate members @ £D.....	=
I enclose cheque/bank transfer No. to cover the total cost of my registration fees and, where applicable, banquet ticket(s)	=
	=
Total	£

Social events form (on reverse side of registration form)

Event.....	Date.....	No of tickets required
Banquet (£X per single ticket).....		
Date.....	Signature.....	

Accommodation Application Form (A4)

Name	
Title.....	
Mailing address.....	
.....	
Hotels: Grade A hotel—superior first class	
Grade B hotel—first class	
Grade C hotel—second class	
Number and type of room required.	
Grade.....	Single Room with/without bath
Grade.....	Double Room with/without bath
Date of arrival.....	Date of departure.....
University halls of residence.....	
Number and type of rooms required.....	
Single Rooms	
Double Rooms	
Date of arrival.....	Date of departure.....
Deposit—instructions, if any, regarding payment of non-returnable deposit.	

INVITED SPEAKERS

A word of warning on the subject of invited speakers. Not surprisingly, many people will assume that as an invited speaker they need not register in advance or pay a fee, and that their accommodation will automatically be reserved on their behalf. Be quite clear as to the scope of your “invitation” and keep a list of invited speakers. It is necessary even for them to process their registration and to apply for accommodation.

VIPS

We had wanted to say more about the mechanics of registration before mentioning VIPs, but the logical time to bring them in is with this note on invited speakers. VIPs are important, and they do have a right to expect that things will be done for them. Nevertheless, as one or two among perhaps 2000 delegates, their interest is best served if, like everyone else, they too complete the official documentation and go through the one and only mill.

In summary, at 12 months your preliminary programme is dispatched, accompanied by a registration form and application forms for accommodation, social events, and scientific contributions, along with a printed reply envelope to be used for everything except the scientific contribution (which is forwarded to the local chapter secretary). The different forms are printed in different columns for easy identification, and, if nothing else, for an international meeting the social events are described in both French and English. We shall be discussing the mechanics of registration next week, but, in the meantime would like to suggest possible designs for the forms so far mentioned (see figures).