Society Partnership Scheme

How to run a great event

January 2018
Most GP Societies’ output revolves around an extensive event schedule. Members value face-to-face interaction above all else, which means that events are incredibly important touch points and can be the most tangible benefit a society offers.

An exciting event timetable can show the diversity of what your society, and general practice as a career, can offer. This guide will give you a head start on getting it right.

Why?

Have a clear vision of what you’re trying to achieve with your event. Make a short list of these, try and succinctly summarise this into a short paragraph. Think about your agenda, the speakers attending and how you want your delegates to feel at the end of the day - do these all tie neatly together?

Why would your target audience want to attend? The easier this question is to answer, the more likely your event is to be a success.

Who?

Think about your audience:

- Who are you creating the event for?
- Why would they want to come to the event and how can you tailor it to them?

People on the inside:

- Form your team and clearly define responsibilities.
- Key roles you should consider for an event team:
  - Event Lead - coordinate the team, manage bookings and logistics of event
  - Speaker Liaison - manage speaker relations
  - Treasurer - ensure the event is financially viable and comes within budget
  - Marketing, publicity and social media - ensure the event is promoted widely
  - Sponsorship - seek supplementary financial aid deemed necessary by the treasurer

What?

Planning an agenda:

- Don’t tire yourselves or your delegates out! Stay true to the vision for the event and prioritise quality over quantity. The best events are often the simplest. Too many choices of workshops can be
confusing for delegates and add extra administration for the team planning the event.

- Ensure your attendees have enough time for comfort breaks and refreshments are scheduled in as appropriate.

- Don’t pit your best speakers again one another - make them headliners!

Finding speakers:

- Keep a speaker database to keep a track of speakers who went down well and those contacts who could help source speakers.

- Social media can be an excellent way of speaking to high profile doctors. Many active GPs use twitter and are happy to be approached to speak or discuss the career online. Don’t be scared to direct message them from GP Society or personal accounts - it could be the start of a great working relationship!

- RCGP Faculty and Officers - your local RCGP faculty is a group of interested GPs in your area who are engaged in working to better the career and promote it to students. It’s likely they many of them already have good links with your medical school or can suggest other good speakers if they aren’t available or appropriate. Get in touch with your local RCGP Faculty administrator to find out more. You can also invite high ranking RCGP Officers to talk at your events. This can be arranged through the student engagement team at students@rcgp.org.uk.

- Medical School - There are GPs working and teaching in your medical school. Speak to the primary care team in your medical school to find out if any would like to help you or if they can suggest inspiring colleagues.

Communicating with speakers:

- Get to the point and know what you’re asking. Doctors are very busy and receive a lot of email traffic. Try to send comprehensive emails with full information, including timings, so that they know what is being asked of them and how they can fit it into their schedule.

- Thank you goes a long way. Speakers are usually doctors taking time out of incredibly busy schedules to inspire the next generation of GPs. Remember to thank them at the event and present them with a card or small gift such as a bottle of wine. They’re more likely to come back and hopefully help with future events and projects.

When?

- Ensure you don’t clash; get relevant teaching and event timetables from school admins, student unions at the start of the year. Think about your specific audience and consider examination times.
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- Most society events take place in autumn term, around freshers, but don’t forget that students can be bombarded at this time of year and you will have stiff competition from other societies so it may be difficult to get your event out there. Think carefully about everything that’s going on during that time and maybe you can capitalise on other events - giving out freebies at Freshers’ Fair or doing shout outs in welcome lectures.

- Give yourself breathing space. There can be a temptation to schedule events early in the term but be realistic with how much time your committee can dedicate during holiday periods. Give yourselves enough time to plan and execute the events well. Usually, you will want to plan three months ahead of time.

Where?

In most instances, events will take place in medical school or student union buildings and event spaces. Make sure to take advantage of free booking for students in most universities. If you are running an event offsite, you’ll need to consider:

- Capacity - how many people will you have in attendance? How many people can you afford to hold the event for? What type of event is this – do you want people rotating round sessions and the room to be set out in cabaret style or will it be lecture style seating? All of this will change the capacity of your room.

- Type - is it a clinical skills workshop, a mock OSCE or a panel debate? This will dictate the type of room you will want and therefore potentially the venue.

- Price - how much does your venue cost? Will this drive ticket prices up? Or will you have to seek sponsorship to cover it? Consider what the event is worth to your audience.

- Proximity to medical school - were you planning to start at 18:30 but attendees only finish teaching in the medical school at 18:15? Ensure you’re close enough to your target audience or provide a gap big enough to cover travel time. If you aren’t providing refreshments, give them a little longer so that they can catch something to eat!

How?

Get organised:

- Timing is everything, read more in the ‘When?’ section.

- People make it happen. A strong team and clear objective with make any event easier to manage.

- Have a clear budget and stick to it. Think about catering, tech, merchandise.
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• Do you need to charge an attendance fee? If your budget is highly dependent on income from ticket sales, you should seek sponsorship to cover costs as ticket sales can often be unreliable.

• If your event is taking place in an external venue, you may be asked for public liability insurance. If your society is affiliated with a students’ union, your activity should be covered by their public liability insurance certificate.

Getting people there...

Ticketing and registration:

• The simplest and most widely available free event registration software is eventbrite.

• Do not forget to ask for access and dietary requirements.

• Think carefully about your ticket pricing; what the event is worth, what your audience can afford and what similar events are priced at.

• Send out clear and concise information when people have registered and a reminder 2-5 days in advance.

Marketing:

• Create a Facebook event and schedule posts from Facebook and Twitter pages. You may want to create a hashtag and a Snapchat filter if you have funds in the budget.

• Helpful free social media tools include canva, an image editor and creator which will help you create more exciting visual content, and hootsuite, a scheduling tool for both Twitter and Facebook.

• Posters and flyers - Post around the medical school, library and any social areas. Make sure to give them out at any other events you’re attending. Student Unions usually have a poster distribution service for halls.

• Email your mailing list and make sure your subject line ‘does what it says on the tin’.

• Use your contacts - school, university, SU comms will all have mailing lists and websites for you to share your event on.

• Lecture shout outs - why not speak to your lecturer and ask if you can do a quick 2-minute shout out before or after class.

• Press - if you have a really high-level speaker, you may wish to invite press. You can arrange through your student union or the RCGP press team.
The event itself...

Before:

- Send any dietary requirements and an agenda to the venue as well as ensuring all payments are made.
- Do a site visit and meet the venue managers/porters ahead of schedule. You can also take the opportunity to walk through your attendee’s journey and understand what may or may not work for set up.
- Arrange a photographer if you can or assign someone from the committee to take photos on the day.
- Brief your team - run through the day together, you’ll be amazed what you will think of!
- Print out signage and create any relevant slides.
- Check your tech - have speakers send their presentations ahead of the event to avoid any tech disasters on the day.

During:

- Ensure you have a registration desk set up and that your team are visible to attendees should they have any questions. Introduce yourselves at the start of the day and be visible throughout the event.
- Join and steer the conversations taking place online via social media. Own the event by posting photos and content from your social media channels as the day goes on.
- Collect feedback - measure the success of your event against your aims and think about how you can use this information going forward - what speakers you invite, the venues you use and what events you do in the future.

After:

- Following the event, you should reflect on how it went as a team and from the feedback you have collected. Did you achieve your aims? You might consider;
  - Attendee numbers
  - Impact
  - Was it a good team effort?
  - Speakers
- Make recommendations for future events and record what you would do the same/differently again.