New Chair – new policies?

The 1992 Annual General Meeting challenges BASM to make the most of its rare change of Chairmanship with decisive action on basic policies.

BASM was perhaps naive openly to bring its assets and good will to the foundation of the National Sports Medicine Institute. Two years and most of the ideas were given to this project and BASM entered a limbo of expectation while the Sports Council remained indecisive. This left BASM uncertain of its future role.

After 6 years of pioneering cooperation with the London Sports Medicine Institute, we find our joint library sequestered; our Education Officer post threatened, with the future of BASM’s education programme uncertain; and our Clinic Register likely to be taken over. The LSMI’s Medical Director – BASM’s Chairman – has been peremptorily removed from his own office and from the BASS – recognized Directorship of his own Exercise Laboratory. This leaves the NSMI without its Academic Director, let alone a recognized university teacher in the post, and gives no clue as to the current whereabouts of BASM’s head office, previously at the LSMI.

What, then, is left for BASM? The attitude of the Sports Council has for long been ambivalent towards this troublesome lobby group which may now seem to have outlived its usefulness.

First, we need strong and partisan leadership. BASM must define its role in a rapidly changing scene. Beyond all else, BASM is the representative membership organization in Sports Medicine in the UK. Only BASM can represent this country in FIMS, the international representative body.

We have an internationally indexed Journal as a basis for wider publications. Do we want to expand this area?

We established Sports Medicine education in the UK and our members have developed commitment and expertise. Those who cherish BASM will feel betrayed if this hard-earned reputation is usurped. We should be wary of bureaucrats seeking to subsume our own Education Officer post under some wider office which would remove BASM’s education programme from BASM’s control. There is no reason, other than the pursuit of political control, why this post should not continue to be funded as such, especially as it is already a full time commitment. If necessary, BASM may have to choose between loss of independence and raising its own education office costs.

Nationally we need to define precisely what interests are to be represented – and to whom. We can lobby for educational interests and for the related consequences in professional recognition, registration and listing. We can follow the American College’s active lead in defining professional standards of practice.

There is a cruder ‘union’ function to be performed – such matters as fees and terms to be negotiated. The details of cooperation between the NSMI which has no members but will have to lay on services, and BASM which has the members to provide, but not the chequebook, will have to be evolved in the coming months or years. The most urgent matters will concern courses left in uncertainty by the NSMI’s slow uptake of activity and setting up and staffing the library and information service so admirably started by LSMI. BASM will have to define its cooperation in return for the assets taken over by NSMI.

There is also the question of BASM’s membership. We have not grown as expected since the reorganization and large rise in subscriptions. Many join, but almost as many default away. We need to be more self-critical. Why do so few doctors join us? What do potential members seek? What percentage of committed sports doctors are BASM members, and so on? What is our current position on non-medics? Is it time to divide into more membership categories and is the case becoming overwhelming for a lay associate category which might in good will and subscriptions for limited affiliation?

In today’s world we should be seeking new funding, perhaps for sports specific services, and we need to draw up some organizational blueprints for the next few years, laying down some long-term projects, perhaps in training, certification, standards and mass fitness at layman levels.

The fact is that a professional membership of under a thousand impresses few in the corridors of power and if BASM wishes to develop more momentum than in recent years, it would be well advised to address such questions with some urgency.