

President's Report – 3rd Annual Business Meeting – BSEC

11/10/08

Ladies and gentlemen, since my Report to the ABM last year May, our Society has continued to achieve its objectives as well as grow in numbers.

Arising from the panel discussion on “Research Ethics in the Caribbean” at last year’s Bioethics Forum, as well as suggestions coming from the audience, our BSEC Executive subsequently worked for several weeks on a “Template for establishing Research Ethics Committees in Caribbean countries”. This important manual was then endorsed by the Executive for distribution to the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of countries across the Caribbean with an invitation to them to become members of BSEC, and was subsequently mailed out to them in January of this year. This manual documents the important steps for establishing research ethics committees and the guidelines for the contents of research proposals. The manual will also be made available at our BSEC website in the members’ section of the Forum, which is accessible to all paid-up members of BSEC. This is another step in our accomplishing our mission in the BSEC Constitution – which is to increase knowledge and understanding through promoting and fostering deliberations about bioethical issues across the English-speaking Caribbean. It also furthers one of the Objectives stated in our Constitution – that of promoting the development of institutional mechanisms for addressing ethical issues arising in all aspects of health, research and policy-making.

In June 2007, BSEC produced its 1st Newsletter, entitled “Bioethics Caribe – A Caribbean Society”, with our Vice-President, Prof. Cheryl Mcpherson being its Editor and – as we say in Jamaica – its “head cook and bottle-washer”. She designed its format and included the presentations made at last year’s Bioethics Forum in Jamaica. The Newsletter was sent via email to all our members, and is currently posted at our BSEC website for all to read.

This Newsletter is another vehicle in the accomplishment of the Mission of BSEC and achieves another of the Objectives in our Constitution, that of promoting research and the publication thereof to provide ethics-based information for practicing professionals and the general public.

In furtherance of our Mission Statement, I was able to connect BSEC into networks with various international agencies and organizations that work in Bioethics. We are now also listed at the European Commission’s SINAPSE, which lists world-wide resources to provide better use of expertise in policy-making. Courtesy of our website coordinator, Mr. Christopher Muir M.Sc., our website also now provides a number of “links of interest” related to Bioethics.

Having facilitated the setting up of research ethics committees across the Caribbean through the guidelines in our manual, I then turned my attention to the next promise I had made in my inaugural speech at the launch of BSEC, that of also facilitating the setting up of health care ethics committees. To this end, a template for establishing such committees has been designed and circulated to members of the BSEC Executive for their input and discussion. We will inform you subsequently as it evolves.

In June last year, five of our members in Jamaica were invited to serve on the steering committee to establish a National Bioethics Committee in Jamaica. After attending a 2 day planning workshop under the auspices of the UNESCO Commission for National Bioethics Committees and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in the United Kingdom, a template was developed for establishing the Committee in Jamaica. Our Honorary Secretary, Prof. Ralph Robinson has since been attending subsequent planning meetings and we were informed 2 weeks ago that the Minister of Government who has responsibility for UNESCO – under whose portfolio the Committee would function, has now endorsed the Committee. This has paved the way for it now to be officially launched.

Members of BSEC in Trinidad, under the leadership of Dr. Grace Charran, are also involved in plans to establish a National Bioethics Committee in that country. They have had a number of meetings in this regard, and have kept me up to date on their deliberations. We wish them God's speed in their endeavours.

Planning for our next BSEC Annual Forum, which is to be held in Trinidad in May next year, has already begun with a planning committee in that country chaired by our Treasurer, Dr. Donald Simeon. The theme is likely to be "Ethics and the Environment". You will be informed in due course as their plans evolve.

In addition to all the foregoing, we continue to provide postings of important happenings in bioethics around the world at our BSEC website, which has a section that can be viewed by the visiting public in order to accomplish another of the Objectives in our Constitution – that of promoting the teaching of bioethics, as well as providing a forum for all interested persons to exchange ideas and address problems in bioethics.

In an effort to maintain contact with our members and regularly update them, I have written four (4) quarterly communications since our last ABM – entitled "From the Desk of the President" – dated Oct. 16, 2007, Jan. 30, 2008, June 30, 2008, and Oct. 2, 2008. In these communications, I inform members of happenings since my last communication, as well as things to come.

Our year's work ended with the planning and execution of another of the Objectives of our Society, that being the hosting of our Bioethics Forum today, which is one of the means of accomplishing the promotion of research and publication. Consequently, the text and proceedings from today's Forum will be included in the next Edition of our Newsletter – Bioethics Caribe, and made available not only to our members who were unable to be here today, but also will be posted at our website for the general public to access.

As we collectively look forward to further work in addressing the needs of our Caribbean people, I wish that you individually contemplate what you would wish us to do, and what topic or issue BSEC should next seek to address. Your Executive is open to your ideas or suggestions.

In closing, I would like to heartily thank the hard-working members of our Executive: Ralph, our Secretary, Treasurer Donald, and Regional Reps. Tony and Eileen in Jamaica, Vice-President Cheryl, and Eastern and Southern Regional Reps. Paul and Merle who – despite their inability to attend Executive meetings in Jamaica, are always quick to respond to discussions and make suggestions by email. I must single out Cheryl and her team here in Grenada for the tremendous job they have done in preparing for and executing our Forum and ABM accomplished today. May I invite you all to give them a solid round of applause!

I have had a wonderful team to work with, and I thank you all for the privilege of serving as your President over the preceding year. I look forward to future work as a member of our budding Bioethics Society.

Derrick Aarons – BSEC President 2006-'08