

Chair's Report 2006-2007

Last year was one of significant change for the Branch. This year was one of significant change for the Society as a whole. This presents a challenge to Branches across the country, but my impression is that we have handled it as well, if not considerably better, than most.

The most obvious change was the introduction of the new protocols for life support. Some people still seem to think that these are the responsibility of the RLSS and get upset that the processes they have followed for the last few years have been changed without them being consulted. I'm sorry they feel this way, but the simple truth is that such changes are decided internationally by the medical community and it is our job to implement them - not to argue with them!

For the first time, the new Life Support protocols are based not simply on anecdotal, empirical evidence but on hard science. We now know what chest compressions do, and it has little to do with the reasons we used to use them for. We also know a lot more about how people learn and how they retain the knowledge and skills that they have learned. For the first time, the protocols have actually been tested in real life before they were released. And, already, the Ambulance Services are reporting that these simpler, 'dumbed down', approaches are resulting in significantly more lives being saved.

Yes, this means less to teach our students. Yes, it has meant the loss of the Life Support 2 award (though relatively few people took it). Yes, it means all our Trainer/Assessors have to retake their LS3 qualifications.

As far as the Branch is concerned, this has meant three things. First, we had to handle the transition of the protocols. I'd like to congratulate Janice, who as our Awards Officer, was the one responsible for 'policing' this and to the best of my knowledge we had NO problems which is more than can be said for many Branches.

Secondly, although the 'training' of TAs was handled by distance learning (more on that in a minute), we decided to hold an evening in which anyone with questions could raise them. This was run by an experienced NTA who is also a Paramedic and I don't think anyone who came away from the evening could complain that it was anything but inspiring. Thirdly, we have had to make sure that all TAs are now LS3 qualified - tonight is a good opportunity to do so if you aren't already - after this we shall be doing a final check to make sure we are all up to speed. The technical transition has been managed by the two BLCs - Clive Teague and Alison Angiolini - and I think they deserve credit for the way in which they have handled it.

As a Branch, we are unique in having two BLCs. It was an experiment - job sharing is a great modern phenomenon and Clive and Alison have handled it exceptionally. We are working on a succession process, so that the role of BLC can move around more frequently than it has in the past and so it is less onerous for any one individual. They have proven this can work, and I suspect it will be a model for other Branches in the future. The big issue with job shares is communication and I don't think anyone could fault the two of them on their management of this. Thank you, Clive and Alison.

This time last year, we were concerned at the lack of suitable TAs for the various disciplines. Since then we have seen a considerable shift. We can't claim to have initiated this, but we have taken advantage of the Society's initiatives. Firstly, we have tried to promote far more exchange between life-saving and life-guarding. The Society has helped with this by introducing self-assessment and distance learning for many of the teaching and assessing roles. We also saw the result of this cross-discipline approach at our competition in the Autumn - with lifeguard and lifesaving teams competing against one another - with some useful learnings for both! And we saw it through the introduction of the new protocols - the two have different protocols to follow, but they are based on the same science and far easier to cross-over.

Ray Jordan took on the responsibility for developing our TA force, and one of his achievements this year was to run a dedicated course for Pool TAs to qualify as Life Saving TAs. We now have not only Ray, as an NTA, but another NTA has rejoined the Branch, and three Mentors have qualified, so any bottlenecks to qualification - which seem to thwart other Branches - in developing the body of Trainers and Assessors - should not affect us. We have already seen a number of new TAs come on-board and there are more in the pipeline.

The teaching body has been stimulated in another way too. For some years, we have complained that the Bronze Medallion had been undermined and no longer attracted younger members. In the last few months there has been an enormous upsurge in interest in the BM, driven by the GCSE in PE and the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. At first, I know I, for one, was cynical about this, but the truth is that it has led to record numbers attending clubs and classes. New guidelines have been offered for the DofE Awards which make it clear that simply attending classes and passing awards is not sufficient for a candidate. At Silver level students are expected to take on teaching roles, and at Gold potentially to engage at a Branch-level. This is a big change and although we have yet to see Gold candidates coming forward for Branch appointments (though we WILL welcome them when they do - and that is a HINT!), there is a growing demand for training as Assistant Teachers for Silver candidates. We intend addressing this in the immediate future.

As you probably all know, in order to pass at Distinction level, a candidate must have held an open-water award. Each summer, this leads to all kinds of logistic problems as we have had very few OW assessors. So, this year, we doubled the number overnight by organising a specialist module. The problem simply shouldn't happen again. This was timely, because the Society in line with HSE guidelines, has added more OW 'vocational' awards to its portfolio and so we can expect even more demand in the next few months from people working and leading groups in OW environments.

Rapidly looming, is the prospect of the Olympics. It seems likely that the 2012 champion is about 16 right now. Surrey is behind the field in terms of its competitive work but I hope we shall see this change soon. The Autumn competition is being moved slightly to encourage schools, colleges and leisure centres to prepare more fully and soon, I hope, we shall be ready to engage with the Regional and National events.

Our outreach work, especially the training of Cricket coaches and the parents of new-born children, continues apace as does the NASTC which seems to build momentum every year. I don't have the precise figures to hand, but we have been running Save A Baby's Life courses throughout the year, courses for Guides and their leaders, and Tina Marley has been working hard behind the scenes making sure that cricket coaches have no excuse for not knowing the basics of life-support and first-aid. Outreach of this kind, is a very important aspect of the Society's work and continues to grow in importance. Again, I hope that we shall be able to stimulate this even more across the Branch this year. Personally, I think it is outrageous that every parent of every newborn child in the county is not offered a SABL course at their first post-natal check-up, and I still question why it is ONLY cricket coaches that we are focused on - surely EVERY sports leader should have been trained by us?!

Anyone who has been involved in the Society, will know that its accounting practices are not the easiest to follow. They are robust, but they involve a lot of work. Two people, in particular, have really kept us on the straight and narrow - Janice as Awards Officer has also been the person who has managed most of our sales through Lifesavers Direct. Ray, as Treasurer, has managed the finances and produced the financial returns to the Society. We are a financially sound Branch, we have been for many years, and I'd like to thank them for keeping us that way.

Communication is crucial to an organisation like ours. It needs to be frequent, up-to-date, and contain enough detail to keep everyone fully informed. We simply can't afford to rely on the post these days, so we have a comprehensive website (www.life-saving.net) which is the central point of reference for everyone involved in life-saving in the county. PLEASE check it regularly for new information.

It has been a busy year. Many of the changes we've addressed have been low profile. The committee are all volunteers and as is the norm, volunteers in one area are usually volunteers elsewhere too. The economy is buoyant too and that always means that folks are under pressure in their working lives too, so I'd like to applaud the committee as a whole for their dedication throughout the year.

Next year will have new challenges. Amongst others, most TAs need to renew their Criminal Records checks, which will involve a lot of work.

Last week, I had an extraordinary job - I had to call River House to clarify the terms of the constitution because we have had more volunteers for positions on the committee than we would normally have places for! We can always accept more, but I take it as a very special sign that this great team are doing a really good job that we are in that position - long may it continue! Thank you every one!

Graham Wilson.